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On the margins of post-coloniality: Vilas Sarang's work and the politics of reception

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**ON THE MARGINS OF POST-COLONIALITY: VILAS
SARANG'S WORK AND THE POLITICS OF RECEPTION**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of the degree

Honours Master of Arts by Research

from

University of Wollongong

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation seeks to find some newnesses or unmapped territories in the discursive formations of post-colonial cultural productions. These unmapped spaces can be the sites of loss or productive change because they are situated beyond nationalism, manicheanism and hybridity. As a means of pointing to these spaces, I have used the work of Vilas Sarang, a bilingual and diasporic Indian writer in English. Vilas Sarang's marginal position in Indian English literature is also analysed to discuss how different models of post-colonial literatures create hierarchies and canons even when they are operating against them. Originary, essentialist and classical notions of representation, identity and culture are seen to be informing the reception of Sarang's work.

His oeuvre challenges almost all the prescribed models of post-colonial literatures and, therefore, meets/creates (in)visible barriers in its canonisation. Sarang's affiliation with existentialism, nihilism and the absurd does not appear to be in harmony with the post-colonial project but his work is grounded in social realities of India. His practice of self-translation across Marathi and English with the collaboration of Breon Mitchell is another aspect that influences his reception but can point to some crucial ruptures in the formation of post-colonial discourses. Thus, the need for new interpretive models of post-colonial cultural productions is asserted.

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This Country is Broken

This country is broken into a thousand pieces;
its cities, its religions, its castes,
its people, and even the minds of the people
— all are broken, fragmented.
In this country, each day burns
scorching each moment of our lives.
We bear it all, and stand solid as hills
in this our life
that we do not accept.
Brother, our screams are only an attempt
to write the chronicle of this country
— this naked country
with its heartless religion.
The people here rejoice in their black laws
and deny that we were ever born.
Let us go to home country, brother,
where, while you live, you will have
a roof above your head,
and where, when you die, there will at least be
a cemetery to receive you.

———— Bapurao Jagtap (a Dalit poet)
translated by Vilas Sarang

CHAPTER 1

Introduction:

This dissertation seeks to critique the ways in which the politics of critical acceptance and reception inform and inscribe readings of literary productions from post-colonial societies. Despite the fact that post-colonial literary studies and theory are revisionary projects that aim to foreground and recuperate repressed, excommunicated, marginalised and othered epistemes, the discourse of the post-colonial project does not mobilise its formations in a completely non-hegemonic mode and, thus, creates its own others and marginalia. Since production of post-colonial discourses is not free from the power/knowledge process, the process of hierarchisation turns some writers and their works into post-colonial ‘ideals’ or icons — the same despotic signifiers that post-colonial discourse seeks to dismantle. The construction of an orthodoxy in post-colonial cultural productions is authorised, monitored and regulated by Western academia. This is not to suggest that this process is always oppressive, because it can also provide better opportunities for circulation and consumption of these cultural productions.

The fact that the field of post-colonial studies has become a site of contestations among theoretical models testifies that the field itself is grappling with some of the most radical historical and cultural material in the human sciences. Nationalist, Marxist, textual, cultural materialist and many other theoretical models profess to “represent” the marginalised voices of ex-colonised societies but most of them are authorised by and circulated in First World academia. For post-colonial literary-cultural productions, one major

focus of debate is provided by *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) which outlines some of the historical and theoretical forces impelling and resisting post-colonial canonisation.

The primary model of this text is one of “writing back” to a hegemonic centre but it operates on the same exclusionist method that it seeks to subvert. The choice of themes, material and language for post-colonial writers is determined by such models and, in this way, post-colonial theorisation contains itself by drawing its own boundaries. These models of post-colonial literatures deny and deprive writers and artists from post-colonial/ex-colonised cultures and societies their access to the themes that are available to the writers from Western society. In this way, post-coloniality remains contained by the different modes and technologies of its reception.

The application of post-colonial critical theory to Indian literature and especially Indian writing in English has generated particularly public and hard-fought debate as can be seen in Arun Mukherjee’s response to *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) or Aijaz Ahmad’s comments about Said and Bhabha. The critical framework of Indian literature in English emphasises textuality with a nationalistic flavour and has been the reason behind the emergence of many canonical figures like Rao, Narayan, Anand, and Rushdie. Though post-colonial theory entails arguments around Spivak, Subaltern Studies, and Homi Bhabha, the terms are often limited to the old binarisms of writing/theory, indigenous/imperial, and Eastern/Western aesthetics. The writers of *The Empire Writes Back* propound that the most dominant characteristic of post-colonial literatures is “a continuity of preoccupations” with the “imperial

process from the moment of colonisation to the present day” (1989, p. 2). This assumption of a “continuity of preoccupations” brings into play a number of hidden aesthetic assumptions when a writer from an ex-colonised country is examined. An Indian writer who does not evince traces of this continuity of preoccupations may be excluded from the mainstream because he or she does not subscribe to a particular theory of post-coloniality. Post-colonial theory becomes problematic because of its modular inadequacy to deal with, for example, writers who translate/write ‘sub-national’ Dalit subaltern literature into/in English.

One such writer, Vilas Sarang, who also writes his own material in both English and Marathi and cross-translates, falls outside of the scope of several theoretical models and has failed to gain critical note from regionalistic critics, nationalist Indian writing in English critics and those who follow the broad model of *The Empire Writes Back*.

In the last one or two decades, post-coloniality and literatures produced in post-colonial (or once-colonised) countries have gained an unprecedented theoretical and critical attention in the Western academia. And this preoccupation of the West with its cultural and historical others has resulted in an institutionalised patronage and/or celebration of the arrival of an other that seeks to correct all historical wrongs,

As we in India hear this distant thunder and watch this high tide surge on the Western horizon, we soon begin to realise that it is us that the scramble is for and that it is over our head that these waters seek to flow.
(Trivedi 1996, p. 232)

The origin and development of post-colonial theory as a field of study in Western academia itself is a paradoxical phenomenon because Western academia as a subspecies of the larger hegemonic culture and society known as 'the West' has, as Edward Said has pointed out in *Orientalism* (1995), always regarded the Orient as a worthy object of study. Post-colonial theory, whether literary or critical, also has its origins in the West and its (the West's) desire to map the boundaries of the other. This institutionalised and academic patronage of post-coloniality more than often operates as an insidious technology of appropriation because of the material and cultural dominance of the West and post-colonial conditions are homogenised in the same way as colonial indigenous peoples were homogenised into 'savages' and 'pagans' as it is obvious from the assumptions of the writers of *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) as they lump together all the societies from Caribbean Countries to New Zealand as producing literature that writes back to the Empire. Insofar as they point to common textual patterns and cultural dynamics arising from imperial history, these homogenisations facilitate theorisation of/about post-coloniality; and they also produce an oppressive closure for the cultural productions from post-colonial societies. Post-colonial theory, with its Manichean East-West binarism, assigns a sedentariness to both sides of its polarised world and, therefore, as it has become a dominant interpretive discourse for the cultural productions of the once-colonised societies, others and represses the productions that inhabit inbetweenesses. So many writers who neither write back to the colonial centre, nor subscribe to an equally oppressive national and nationalist ideology, do not find any theoretical and critical space for the assertion of their creativity. A sketchy list of the names of the writers who, despite the fact that

they write in English, are not caught in the binarism of East-West and, thus, have not entered the dominant arena of critical contest that would give them national or international reception would suffice to illustrate the point: Arun Kolatkar, Dilip Chitre, Vilas Sarang, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, Pritish Nandy. Although their names are cited in surveys of Indian English writing, they receive nowhere near the same attention as Ezekiel or Ramanujan or the familiar novelists. Their marginality is the evidence that signifiers of post-coloniality have become as despotic and dictatorial as the ones they wanted to fissure.

Post-colonial theory, like other fields of knowledge, operates on some fundamental assumptions that it cannot transcend. These assumptions of the First World theorists of post-coloniality, as Arun Mukherjee has described them, are that the major concern of the literatures from erstwhile colonised societies is the resistance to the absent coloniser and that the writers who are engaged in the creation of this counter-discourse are representing their people authentically (Mukherjee, A. 1996, p. 15).

The aim of this dissertation is not to construct bridges over the gaps in theorisation of post-colonial literatures but to point out the gaps and to widen the aporetic spaces that exist between the master or dominant theoretical discourses and the other discourses, or the discourses of the other.

The shift from 'Commonwealth Literature' (under which banner Indian Writing in English first developed) to 'post-colonial literatures' has also failed to remove all the inherent contradictions

of that formation because so far the dominant post-colonial texts and their critiques are in the languages of the First World readers and it seems that post-coloniality is best, if not always, expressed in languages that Western theorists can understand. This situation has resulted in Ngugi's decision to give up writing in English (Ngugi 1986) but even he has to translate himself because no First World theorist can be bothered to learn Gikuyu, even if it is to read Ngugi's writings. Ngugi is important to the First World academia as long as he speaks or writes in English, whether original or translated.

Moreover, post-colonial theory, while dealing with colonial and post-colonial issues, homogenises the erstwhile colonised society into a society that suffered only when the colonisers were there and, after the departure of the colonisers, the only concern of the writers in that society is to write back to the colonising centre.

This premature and rather naive celebration of the inclusion/arrival of the other that reflects the territorial and political powers of the West in the dominant Western academic discourses is less about the other *per se* than the self's desires and fears arising out of its interaction with the other. The whole notion of "writing back to the centre" and the dominance it has gained in the post-colonial discourse secures a centrality for the self even in the post-colonial period and does not allow any amnesia of the colonial period.

The radical potential of Deleuze and Guattari's advice "Don't sow, grow offshoots...Have short-term ideas" (1987, p. 25) becomes evident when one takes into account how post-colonial theory does not allow any random offshoots of thought by prescribing a return to

its own origins. Post-colonial theory prescribes and theorises only that originary rebellion that it can contain. The word 'back' in 'writing back' denies a possibility of short-term thoughts to the post-colonial world because it assumes and prescribes post-colonial world to be always preoccupied with the colonial centre.

The subject of this dissertation, Vilas Sarang, like Samuel Beckett, is the schizonomad from a previously colonised society. Vilas Sarang does not write back to either colonial centre or neo-colonial centre or any other centre. All of his writings are at odds with the presently dominant critical models and groups. He does not write much these days (Mitchell 1996, Personal correspondence). His characters do not reflect the colonial centre or the after-effects of colonialism in their society. They exist mainly in an urban environment of India and describe their surroundings with a passion for minute details and, most of the time, they roam around wrapped in their own labyrinthine thoughts that give speed to their sedentary lives or stasis to their nomadic lives. Because of these characteristics, none of the dominant critical practices can provide a model for the interpretation of his writings.

Moreover, the fact that, in India, the monolithic Hindu/Brahminic structures operate in the similar fashion as globalised Western oppressive structures do — by excluding, appropriating and/or marginalising the other — is also neglected when the West is seen as a source of oppression (Mukherjee, A. 1996, p. 17). For example, most of the old stalwarts of the studies in literature from post-colonial societies are the writers who subscribe to the dominant ideologies in an ex-colonised country. For the

mobilisation of an effective post-colonial emancipatory project, it is important that theoretical discussions of the interaction between the colonising and the colonised peoples not construct homogenised versions of the West and the East, as the oppressor and the oppressed. In the interaction among different races, the West is not the only source of exclusion and repression and there are other pre-colonial and post-colonial social realities as well that may have nothing to do with the Western colonisation. What post-colonial theory fails to foreground is the fact that oppression does not begin and end with the arrival and departure of colonisers and that caste system, religious and bureaucratic authorities and economic exploitation of the native by the native can be more vicious than colonialism. It is possible to struggle against the colonisers and make them leave the country (as happened in India) but it is more difficult to fight against the native forms of oppression and it is more painful to be othered by one's own fellow beings. Sarang's short stories deal precisely with these themes. For example, his short story "The Testimony of an Indian Vulture" effectively illustrates the painful fact that Indian society is divided into those who eat meat and those who do not. Here, an internal cultural formation not directly related to British colonialism is mockingly called into question.

Just like the terms 'the oppressor' and 'the oppressed,' the choice of English language by Indian writers is subject to the same essentialist simplifications of Indian and Western critics. One of the most common simplifications is that the Indian writers, or writers from other ex-colonial societies, who have chosen to write in English have done so because they want to write back to the colonial centre. The English language was the administrative instrument in the

colonial period and it is the administrative instrument in the post-colonial period as well (Ahmad 1992, p. 74). Despite the fact that English language is the medium of government, education and communication, one of the most frequently debated problems of post-colonial literatures and theories is the use of English language for conveying indigenous/native experiences or an essential Indianness which is supposed to be independent of the state's policies about language.

The classical notion that a language is only suitable for conveying the social and cultural reality of the society it originates from is problematised by Narasimhaiah's argument that

Sanskrit was not an 'Indian' language, nor were Arabic and Persian, but the one became the very breath of India...and the other two...have fathered forth...Urdu."
(Narasimhaiah 1968, p. ix)

Indianness is a problematic construct because it is employed by powerful groups to institutionalise selective images as essential realities of national identity which then operate to maintain elite privilege. The popularity of literary works such as Hermann Hesse's novel *Siddhartha* in the West or Gita Mehta's *A River Sutra* amongst English-speaking Indians and overseas readers, indicates the definitive status of a 'high-culture' model of Eastern spirituality that disadvantages works exposing material and class struggle in a post-independence era. Modernist works such as Anita Desai's early novels dealing with personal neuroses arising from social management of gender or contemporary Dalit writings toughly parading tales of rape, hunger and rage are not seen as conveying an accepted image of

Indianness. Despite much debate about the Indianness of English, the critical issue is not fundamentally whether a text is in English or Marathi, but whether it presents a form or content compatible with normative cultural discourses of national identity.

The argument that a writer in English is forever harking back to an imperial source and is therefore a cultural traitor may have some validity in certain exoticising treatments of the East for western audiences, but it may also be a smokescreen to hide a critical engagement with local issues of culture and power. Equally, the argument that writers in English are appropriating the language of former masters to effect some textual counter-attack on the masters' culture diverts attention from the work that text may be attempting in its own material cultural context.

The use of English by Indian writers is a heterogeneous practice which reflects a whole range of social, cultural, and historical processes which do not necessarily always have their origin in the colonial history of India. This heterogeneity is reflected in the differences one can observe in the writings of Raja Rao, V. S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, and Vikram Seth. The rhythm of English as it is used in India is closer to the rhythm of Indian life. Narasimhaiah (1968) points out that the English language as used by English people is not suitable for conveying Indian reality and, therefore, Indian writers have to "dislocate the conventional syntax" of English in order to "approximate the patterns and rhythms of Punjabi, Kannada or Tamil speech" (Ibid., p. xiv). In the colonial period, this indigenisation of English had its own peculiar consequences. The colonial subject wanted to colonise the native minds but the linguistic mimicry of the natives was both excessive and subversive

(Bhabha 1994). The mockery in the native's English could only be contained and purged by comedy and jokes. The term 'babu English', as pointed out by Trivedi, was a classic colonial joke (Trivedi 1996, p. 238) that helped the colonial subject deal with the excessive. When mimicry is coupled with hybridity and nomadism it is even more discomfoting and subversive.

Bhabha has pointed out that the introduction and appropriation of English canonical texts in India contaminated the authority of the colonisers and, at the same time, disturbed the Brahminic structures of caste and class. An untouchable using English for writing a political pamphlet is more potentially subversive than a Brahmin using English for official correspondence, but the secular and democratising logic of English textuality authorises this very subversion. The native variety of English was and still is a source that dismantles the indigenous master-narratives as well as the colonial or imperial ones. The native users of the English language carve out a space outside the authorised Hindu/ Brahminic national discourses of caste, race and class and, with their indigenous variations and re-appropriation of the syntax and lexis of 'standard' English, they disrupt the colonial hegemony as well as indigenous Sanskrit aesthetics.

This interventionist potential of Indian English to contaminate and destabilise has often been viewed only from a Eurocentric point of view. When Ashcroft et al. valorise the metonymic function of language variance in post-colonial writing, they discuss it only for its potential of granting an entry of the post-colonial culture in English texts. This critical patronage has its own

problems because it remains Eurocentric even in its claims of representing the other. The Eurocentric discussion of syncreticity, hybridity and the entry of the other cultures through untranslated words acquires a (post)capitalistic form of the consumption of the exotic. The indigenous realities, knowledges and cultures remain marginalised when the Western episteme is taken to be the universal one.

Another argument that deserves attention is that English has become a *lingua franca* in twentieth-century India and, therefore, is as indigenous as other regional languages. The force of this argument is undermined by the brute social reality that only “a tiny proportion (somewhere between three and eight per cent, depending on the skill) can read, write and speak Indian English” (Perry 1992, p. 237). Though English is an official language, along with 14 other official languages, its use for bureaucratic communication is different from its use for literary and cultural productions because these different uses of English result in different cultural trajectories. Western discursive representations of Indian English literature tend to operate without considering the stark economic and social realities and, in this way, this celebration of the arrival of the other which is going to dismantle the hegemony of Western culture remains shallow and unrealistic.

Western theories such as post-structuralism can help the post-colonial project because of their disruptive potential. The discussions of the role of poststructuralist and postmodernist theories in subverting and dismantling the hegemonic master-narratives most often valorise the Western academic discourses and can very easily

produce academic colonisation as Ashcroft et al. have pointed out that "certain tendencies within Euro-American structuralism and post-structuralism have operated in the same way as the Western historicising consciousness, to appropriate and control the Other" (Ashcroft et al. 1989, p. 162). Viewed from this angle, Sarang at once appears to utilise the destabilising potential of poststructuralism's radical scepticism and to equally resist containment within a Western hegemonic 'school' of art.

More often than not the civilisational other of the West has contributed to the monolithic narrative of Western history but the dominant culture seems to be the discoverer of the greatness of its others. That the presence of colonies was itself a decentralising force that paved the way for the development of the theories that question the notion of a fixed cultural centre can help the post-colonial project achieve its true potential of subversion and disruption. The cultural artefacts of the colonies brought back to the metropolitan centre were "the earliest signifiers of the Other" (Ibid., p. 157) in the West. But the use of English language to create literature is different from the use of clay or paint to create an image of Krishna. English was the language of the oppressors; whereas, the cultural artefacts of the colonies in the nineteenth century were the result of native content and form without any appropriation of Western cultural material. The use of English for creating literature involves an appropriation of a medium that has its origins in the colonial history. The arrival of post-colonial theory as a dominant discourse in Western academia may provide a better market for the cultural productions of ex-colonial societies but it does not mean that it can generate any symmetrical relations of power between the East and

the West. Post-colonial theory does not and cannot promise any extra-discursive space for the others of the West and it operates within Western capitalism which can "absorb, coopt, and contain its Others" (Paranjape 1996, p. 44). And this paradox of post-coloniality originates from the site where post-colonial theory has gained dominance. Sarang's poetry and stories deal with modernist themes and, though modernism originated in the West as a movement of thought, it was the people from other cultures who provided the impetus. Now, these marginalised cultures are providing the impetus and material for the development of post-colonial theory in the West.

Because post-colonial discourses have their origins in the First World academia — as colonial discourses originated in the West — the reception of cultural productions from the 'Third World' is mediated and contained by the West (Dirlik 1990). The reception of the writing from the so-called Third World countries depends on the Western models of literary excellence and/or, when this is not the case, the radicality of a work in its relation to the colonial past of its society and the neo-colonial present is the tool of appraisal. Even in this context, radicality is often measured in terms of an oppositional model of national identity founded in ideas of the nation adopted from Western models. A true post-colonial perspective on literature has not been achieved because the Western episteme is still dominant. In the words of Sri Aurobindo, if Indians had colonised the West, they would have dismissed:

Shakespeare as a drunken barbarian of considerable genius with an epileptic imagination, the whole drama of Greece and Spain and England as a mass of bad ethics

and violent horrors...and French fiction as a tainted and immoral thing. (Aurobindo 1943, p. 83)

These lines make it clear how material and cultural dominance can affect the reception of a supposedly autotelic and transcendental literary writing. Ashcroft et al. argue that the study of English literature and the circumference of Empire grew simultaneously and helped each other in the naturalisation of constructed values like 'civilisation' and 'humanity' (Ashcroft et al. 1989, p. 3). Language was the vehicle through which the constructs of the colonial centre were internalised by the colonised. Ironically, post-colonial theory of the 'writing back' kind, while it is grounded in the idea of resistance to centralist hegemony, fails to take into account the many regional languages on the colonial periphery which continued to be sites of resistance less prone to co-option than work in English. In concentrating on English language production 'on the margins' of some central power, the Empire Writes Back model of post-coloniality perpetuates the Eurocentric values and discourses of knowledge control that it otherwise seeks to dismantle.

Inscribing the field:

English language and literature in India are the legacies of British colonialism and the education policy introduced by the British Raj. The development of English literary studies and colonialism have intertwined histories because the teaching of English literature was associated with humanist development of character, when, in fact, it was a means of dissemination of English political ideology. As Gauri Viswanathan has pointed out, English literature as a field of study appeared in the colonies even before it became a recognised field of

study in the home country. The introduction of English literary studies was considered an integral part of gaining political and cultural dominance in India — and other colonies as well (Viswanathan 1989, p. 3). The teaching of English language in the education system was instigated by Lord Macaulay in order to turn some of the natives into the clerks who could understand the native languages and the language of the rulers without questioning the authority of Western hegemony. The ‘civilising mission’ of empire which sought to reproduce the native as western citizen under the rubrics of Christianity and liberal humanism was caught in a fundamental contradiction. To produce ‘the same’, it had to establish the native as ‘primitive other’; to keep itself in power it needed to maintain that other as different and in need of its aid. Lord Macaulay’s much-quoted Minutes on the education of Indians convey the political utilitarianism that was brutally and insidiously at work behind the education policy in colonial India:

We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. To that class we might leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country. (Macaulay 1995, p. 430)

The teaching of English literature rather than language was chosen to form this mediatory class that would be the instrument of indigenisation of British ideology and to establish the cultural hegemony of the West over the East:

the Eurocentric literary curriculum of the nineteenth century was less a statement of the superiority of the Western tradition than a vital, active instrument of Western hegemony in concert with commercial

expansion and military action. (Viswanathan 1989, p. 167)

This hegemony has not disappeared completely and still plays a very important role in the production and reception of cultural and literary texts even after almost fifty years of India's independence from the British and in the late twentieth century when neo-colonial powers are not British any more and multinational organisations and politics of consumerism have, supposedly, fissured the grand cultural narratives. Because the on-going cultural hegemony of the West is still a social reality in so many post-colonial or ex-colonised societies, Ashcroft et al. have argued that the post-colonial project has helped create a counter-discourse to Western hegemony through recuperation/reappropriation of the English language (Ashcroft et al. 1989).

The 'civilising mission' of empire which sought to reproduce the native as Western citizens under the rubrics of Christianity and liberal humanism was caught in a fundamental contradiction. To produce 'the same', it had to establish the native as 'primitive other'; to keep itself in power it needed to maintain that other as different and in need of its aid. (JanMohamad, 1985; Bhabha, "Other Question," 1994) This innate double-bind has given birth to many paradoxical cultural phenomena. Some natives internalised the cultural hegemony and became 'babus' — the class that Macaulay dreamt of — and some internalised it for the production of cultural and literary texts that transgressed the prescribed boundaries of English literary education. This native production of excess and appropriation of the language and literature of the colonising subject was the moment of the beginning of post-colonial project. As Mulk

Raj Anand has pointed out, the project of the colonising subject turned against him/her because the natives not only got access to the world of Enlightenment ideas but also made the English language a medium of expressing their demand for political freedom (Anand 1989). English language also started functioning as a *lingua franca* among the speakers of different regional languages, being an official language of the Empire. Because India had already been subject to so many incursions — by Greeks, Persians, Arabs, and Moguls — and most of these incursions had resulted in the creation of a multicultural and heterogeneous Indian society, the results of the introduction of an English education system was not absolutely disempowering for the Indian people. Like many other alienating and dominating policies of the Empire, the “imperial expansion ... had a radically destabilising effect on its own preoccupation and power... the alienating process turned upon itself” (Ashcroft et al. 1989, p. 12). William Walsh has also commented on the capacity of Indian civilisation to absorb outside influences because, despite all the invasions and incursions, India “has throughout its history shown a genius for absorption and persistence” (Walsh 1990, p. 1) and “India keeps an unbroken connection with its origins more naturally and more effectively than most other contemporary societies” (Ibid., p. 15).

The re-appropriation of foreign cultural elements to create a hybridity that is more complicit with the indigenous rather than the foreign has already been a part of India’s historical development. In the same manner, despite the epistemic violence of colonialism, Indians re-appropriated some of the crucial emancipatory ideas from the liberal humanist education system of British Imperialism. Mulk

Raj Anand gives the example of Bankim Chandra Chatterji who, in the mid 19th century, could not find a single word for political liberty in Sanskrit or Bengali and started thinking of freedom only after reading John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* (Anand 1989, pp. 26-27). This example supports Homi Bhabha's concept of the ambivalence of dominant discourse because, in this situation, the oppressive beginning of the colonial discourse is shown to have produced its own slippage and deferral through the production of a figure of mimicry in the introduction of English education: "The *menace* of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority" (Bhabha 1994, p. 88). Once mobilised, the colonial discourse cannot contain its slippage that is inherent in its origins, though often repressed and excluded under the guise of a monolithic narrative of grand unfolding of Western civilisation on its own limits and peripheries. The very language that were taught to the colonised to help the rulers rule "the millions we govern", having become an elite mode of expression of humanist ideas and a means of communication between different regions of India, served the colonised:

Raja Ram Mohan Roy... as well as the early leaders of the Indian National Congress, used the English language in their speeches and writings... throughout the century of our struggle for the achievement of many freedoms, we have benefited from the adoption of Indian English as our medium of expression. (Anand 1989, p. 27)

Besides the appropriation of English for their political aims, the colonised subjects used English as a medium of their artistic and creative expression and this use of the language of the colonisers

became the subject of a whole field of study. Though, at that time, the use of English for political speeches and the use of English for literary and artistic expression were thought to belong to two different ideological categories because of the notions that art and literature are autotelic phenomena that transcend the political and the historical realities, they were both transgressive of the original project of the colonising subjects because the colonial education only desired to construct a voice of the colonised subject that could only be subservient to and complicit with the British rulers.

With the reappropriation of the language of the colonisers, Indians began the reappropriation of the different genres of Western literature as well which also violated and challenged the sanctity of narrative forms as inseparable from the narratives of Western civilisation. The genre of the novel as a linear narrative for unfolding the actions of European characters and its whole history of the development also underwent a major change with the rise of the novel in the colonies. The whole genre of the novel was unknown in India before the eighteenth century. Rabindranath Tagore is generally believed to have started writing after reading Wilkie Collins' *Woman in White* and Anand believes that he would not have written anything if he had not read Tolstoy's *Confession* and *War and Peace* (Ibid., p. 28). Moreover, Anand's statement shows that the source of inspiration did not and does not always come from the culture of the colonising centre, even though the medium is English.

In the beginning, Indian literature in English was a revolt against as well as a recuperation of Hindu belief systems. The novels of Fielding, Brontë and Jane Austen provided the indigenous writers

with the idea of the love match that led to the novels dealing with the themes of love and thus constructed an alternative emotional and societal ethos in contrast to the dominant practice of arranged marriages. The first novel of Chandra Chatterji, *Rajmohan's Wife*, tells the story of a woman who falls in love with the brother of her husband and the love wins after many upheavals. Rabindranath Tagore also provided a comparison /contrast between love and arranged marriage in his novel *The Wreck* (Anand 1989 p. 32). These narratives mark the beginning of a change in the themes of regional literatures and the dominant Brahminic ideals faced the challenges of Western bourgeois ideals of liberty and individual freedom and progress.

During the struggle for India's independence, the stalwarts of Indian literature in English reverted to nativism and nationalism with an obvious inspiration from Gandhi's home-spun ideologies of the nation. The pre-colonial rural space appeared to be the most appealing space for (re)constructing a 'pure' national identity because the city with its signs of the Empire and Western civilisation was not conducive to the recuperation of a 'pure' indigeneity. Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* is the most famous example of Indian writers' effort to reconstruct an Indianness based on village life and Hindu epics like the *Mahabharatha*:

Kanthapura is the first conscious attempt to create an Indian dialect suited to the Indian soil. The assertion of nationalism is not only in the story but also in the technique. (Karnani 1995, p. 39)

Raja Rao's use and style of English is an attempt to turn the English language into one of the several indigenous languages of India that

are considered suitable for conveying Indian experiences and social realities. The efforts to recuperate a pre-colonial identity and cultural ethos, despite the use of the language of the colonisers and theoretical problems of essentialism and nostalgia, marked the beginning of anti/post-colonial cultural productions; “The development of national literatures and criticism is fundamental to the whole enterprise of post-colonial studies” (Ashcroft et al. 1989, p. 17) because these nationalist literatures gave birth to a counter-discourse that helped mobilise an indigeneity that could displace/replace the authority of colonialism. Because the modes of reception and appreciation of cultural productions had already been established through the study/teaching of canonical texts, the nationalist/indigenous cultural productions were contained within different discourses of reception and evaluation and, supposedly, autotelic aesthetic hierarchies. The cultural productions of the centre were considered more important and those at the “periphery” were categorised and evaluated not under the rubric of art or literature but anthropology and oriental studies as if production of art and literature were the divine right of the imperialists only. Though these native cultural productions in the English language foregrounded a pluricentric reality, the centre remained transcendental. After the independence of India and other colonies, the literature of these societies was contained within a general field of study called “Commonwealth Literature” and, as Meenakshi Mukherjee has noted, England was not part of this enterprise and maintained the status of an absent centre (Mukherjee, M. 1996, p. 6).

The problem of acceptance of Indian English literature was not only outside India but also inside India. Though the celebratory

attitude towards cultural productions of ex-colonised countries that has appeared in Western academia after the term “Commonwealth Literature” has given way to “post-colonial literatures,” criticism of Indian English literature within India is still dealing with the problem of the “Indianness” of Indian English literature and what this Indianness stands for. Oliver Perry in his book *Absent Authority: Issues in Contemporary Indian English Criticism* quotes some sentences from a personal letter that C. D. Narasimhaiah wrote to him: “I have some strong prejudices against Indian English poetry which... is largely metropolitan in its content and expression” and the poets are not “grounded in their native culture” or “nourished by it” (Perry 1992, p. 16). Such a statement from Narasimhaiah (who, as one of the founders of the university study of Commonwealth literature in India and editor of *The Literary Criterion*, has had a long-standing influence on Indian writing in English criticism) betrays how the concept of ‘Indianness’ can exclude the writings that describe contemporary and urban experiences of Indian society. Though recuperation of pre-colonial national and indigenous reality was an important step by the pioneers of Indian English literature, the continuous rejection of metropolitan and urban Indian reality by many Indian critics has hampered the discussion of contemporary theoretical problems in Indian English criticism and “criticism by Indians and others has dealt repeatedly with the three major English novelists — R. K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, and Raja Rao — whose work spans decades before and after independence” (Ibid., p. 7).

This process of canonisation that operates on the basis of an essentialist idea of “Indianness” still reflects how deeply the British education system has affected the process of cultural productions.

Though the curriculum of English literary study during the colonial period was not overtly based on any definitive concept of 'Englishness', the concentration on authors such as Shakespeare, Milton and Wordsworth implied a valuing of tradition and civilisation as literary high culture (Viswanathan 1989). Work from India (especially in early figures such as Aurobindo or Tagore) either strived itself or in its critical reception was valued as striving to both emulate and surpass the received Western models. This strategy was effective as far as the creation of a counter-discourse was concerned but after the independence of India, turned into a domination of elitist aesthetics that were coterminous with the concept of 'Indianness.'

The original negation of urban experiences because the city was considered a Westernised space has proved to be the rut in which indigenous criticism of Indian Writing in English seems to have been caught. The theoretical position that provided the space to launch a counter-discourse has become the site of a nostalgia that rejects contemporary forms of expression as essentially non-Indian. This state of indigenous criticism is not different from imperial criticism of Indian English Literature in its attitude towards Indian English literature:

nationalist criticism, by failing to alter the terms within which it operates, has participated implicitly or even explicitly in a discourse ultimately by the very imperial power its nationalist assertion is designed to exclude. Emphasis may have been transferred to the national literature, but the theoretical assumptions, critical perspectives, and value judgements made have often replicated those of the British establishment. (Ashcroft et al. 1989, p. 18)

If Indian English literature has been othered by the colonial centre, the nationalist sentiment has accorded similar treatment to Indian English literature within India after the independence. All the discussions of Indian English literature have been only in English. As B. N. Prasad's report indicates, there has been not even a single article on any kind of Indian English literature and writing from 1957 to 1983 in any Hindi literary journal of India (Prasad 1983, p. 72). The writers who choose to write in English are considered to be elitists/outsideers by the critics who employ regional languages of India because of Indian English's "historical origins in pre-Independence British English and multiple and divisive forms and functions at that time" (Perry 1992, p. 56). Moreover many critics have continued to employ traditional British models of criticism. And, if resorting to these models gives critics a bad conscience about being neo-colonialist, they turn to equally traditional formalistic systems such as *rasa-dhavanī* aesthetics from Indian history.

Ashcroft et al. suggest that this conflict between indigenous and foreign theories of criticism is basically a problem related to the project of decolonisation (Ashcroft et al. 1989, p. 117). The problem of choosing or prescribing an ideal model of decolonising literature and society is not an easy one to solve. Privileging some ancient critical theory is also an important strategy for asserting the specificity of a cultural tradition and prevent it from being incorporated into a neo-colonialist Western aesthetic, but it can also function as a limiting strategy when it fails to include Indian urban or metropolitan experiences in an aesthetic framework. Whereas the

traditional indigenous literary criticism of India has also proved resilient against the neo-universalism of post-modernism which foregrounds the play of endless deferral and empties textual agency of its political power by undermining notions of essential indigeneity and the material referentiality of discourse, the same traditional aesthetic has, more often than not, precluded the experimentation and dynamism that is required to interrogate and abrogate the hegemony of Western modernity.

The reason behind the fact that the reception of Indian English literature within India requires so many critical and theoretical debates is that “more than anywhere else in the post-colonial world, perhaps, the possibility of writing in vernacular languages other than english [sic] exists in India” (Ashcroft et al. 1989, p. 122) and often regionalism and nativism are used interchangeably and supremacy is assigned to cultural productions in regional languages to assert a parochial and problematic Indianness which also functions as a tool of a homogenised representation of a society that is fractured by linguistic and ethnic variations. In the presence of a non-dynamic and essentialist nativism, it is difficult for any writer to seek recognition through experimentation and avant-gardism. ‘Nativist’ theories can be narrowly prescriptive so that even the most critically conscious writers of Indian birth who work abroad and with complex critical apparatus ‘suspect’ for its international derivation are not welcomed. One critic rejects Homi Bhabha and Spivak because

their stake in India and the health of our academic culture...is minimal. They speak to the West, seek to modify Western modes of thinking and writing. If they

had a real stake in India, they would publish in India, ensure that their work is readily available here. But I am yet to find a single essay by either of them in an Indian periodical. (Paranjape 1996, p. 42)

This example illustrates how difficult it is for anyone who does not subscribe to the essentialist nativism and who does not see the world, to borrow a phrase from Sarang (1994), in East-West dichotomy to gain recognition in India. At another level, these objections against Bhabha and Spivak also illustrate that the politics of publishing, marketing, circulation and consumption of literary and critical texts plays a very important role in the reception of a writer or critic.

On the other hand, if essentialist and nativist theories are not employed, then a lack of understanding of the historical and cultural contexts of Indian English appears and the critics start applying Western critical theories without caring for the cultural relevance of these theories. Oliver Perry observes that some critics “display their new learning of fashionable foreign theories” in order to gain immediate attention even when they do not have a “clear understanding of what could be a meaningful extension of the entire approach for the Indian English context” (Perry 1992, p. 69). Perry gives the example of the (mis)use of archetypal criticism based on Jungian psychoanalysis which is employed without understanding that Jung’s idea of “collective unconscious” was rooted in the “Christian-classical West” despite his interpretations of mandalas. The consequences of these “uninformed and shallow borrowings” by Indian critics are more dangerous for Indian English literary tradition than uninformed interpretations of Indian English literature by Western critics (Ibid.). In the local or national critical

scene in India, different critical approaches co-exist and every prominent critic has some personal followers and it is also possible to find some English teachers “still swearing by Carlyle and Ruskin, Pater and Arnold” (Paranjape 1996, p. 40). Perry has suggested that this lack of a single or linear critical tradition is because of the lack of a single political theory. Indian English criticism remains a “multidimensional, multidisciplinary and multicultural” field (Perry 1992, p. 70) with a pervasive fixation on the “Indianness” of Indian English literature.

At a global level or in the First World academia, where post-colonial theory and literatures are the latest buzz words in the fields of literature and cultural studies, there are different models and circuits of interpretations and reception of a so-called “Third World” text. Fredric Jameson in his article “Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism” has asked for a different approach to Third World texts because these texts are basically allegories of a nation (Jameson 1986, p. 69). If this is the only model for reading a text from a so called Third World nation, say India, and all the texts are allegories of the nation and all critics are looking for national allegories, then experimentalists like Chitre, Kolatkar or Sarang are doomed to marginality because their work gets its inspiration from French symbolists, Dadaism and existentialism which do not necessarily ask for a mimetic, representational or allegorical reading. This model of reading a text would always find these experimental texts as only derivative texts that are modelled after the traditions that have passed their hey-day in the First World academia. In fact, Jameson’s prescriptive strategies are based on a Eurocentric model of cultural productions and Western history operates as a self-justified

‘given’ behind this recommendation and “his conceptualisation of the Third World nation’s identity is shaped by economic and cultural models that are western” (Pappu 1996, p. 90).

In JanMohamed and Parry’s model of post-colonial reality, the world remains a bifurcated and polarised reality with its Manichean dichotomies between black and white, the colonised and the coloniser, exploiter and exploited, oppressor and oppressed. There are no in-between spaces, no thirdnesses and no hybridity other than impurity and critical naïveté. Assertion of ethnicity and cultural identity without any acknowledgment and awareness of fluidity, contingency or ruptures of shifting subject positions is the prescribed way to reach a cultural, ethnic and national utopia.

On the other side of this manichean world are Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak - both of whom are critically aware of the limitations of Manichean binarism. Ania Loomba has pointed out the problems with Bhabha’s theory of hybridity and how this hybridity is enunciated in his writings. Some of the problems that Loomba has discussed are that Bhabha tries to jump from “a particular act of enunciation to a theory of all utterance” (Loomba 1994, p. 309) by taking one example and making it account for the whole colonial encounter. Similarly Loomba has pointed out how Spivak’s theory of silent subaltern subjects suggests an impossibility of subaltern agency. Though Spivak is more aware of her positionality as a post-colonial critic and theoretician than Bhabha, both of them have not produced theories that can take into account all the possible ways of recovering, negotiating and enunciating one’s identity and agency. Spivak’s work has resulted in an assertion of theoretical

impossibility of subalterns' voice and denial of a "nostalgic, revisionist recovery" of subjectivity (Ibid., 309). Loomba has pointed out in her article that some "alternative ways of being and seeing" must be recognised and welcomed if we have to preventing the subaltern from being "theorized into silence"(Ibid., pp. 319-320):

The choice between stark oppositions of coloniser and colonised societies, on the one hand, and notions of hybridity that leave little room for resistance outside that allowed by the colonising power on the other, between romanticising subaltern resistance or effacing it, is not particularly fertile. (Ibid., p. 308)

Another model of post-colonial literatures which is not an original contribution to the field but rather operates on an eclectic combination of different theories and now has acquired almost a neo-colonial canonical importance is propounded by Ashcroft et al. It not only speaks on behalf of all the post-colonial subjects but also celebrates their arrival in the global academic and critical discourses. What was once a colonial centre now becomes a post-colonial centre when all the nations which were once part of the Empire are now writing back to the centre. The cultural hegemony of the centre is taken for granted because "the nexus of power involving literature, language, and a dominant British culture has strongly resisted attempts to dismantle it" (Ashcroft et al. 1989, p. 4). This homogenisation of all post-colonial literatures constructs a necessity in order to facilitate post-colonial thoerisation that operates on the binarism of centre and periphery. In this manner, all the post-colonial nations and cultures are homogenised and the presence of neo-colonial hegemony, multinational capital enterprises, mass media are seen less powerful and influential than the British culture.

The works of such writers as Pritish Nandy, Arun Joshi, Mehrotra, Kolatkar, Chitre and Sarang do not fit the criterion of the First World post-colonial theorist because they move away from almost all the centres rather than writing back to the centre. Moreover, these writers evince a multiplicity of influences which do not have their origin in the colonial legacies of English literary studies or traditionalist-Indianist aesthetics of *rasa-dhavani* theory. Because of the rhizomatic nature of their affiliations, these writers have not found much recognition and critical attention has concentrated on Ezekiel and Ramanujan.

At the end of the twentieth century, the only source of cultural imperialism, in contrast to *The Empire Writes Back* model, is not the old colonial centre and the spaces beyond prescriptive post-coloniality and recuperation can also be truly post-colonial, though there are not contained and consumed by theorists yet. Arun P. Mukherjee has outlined some naive assumptions of post-colonial theory:

- (a) The theory claims that the major theme of literatures from post-colonial societies is discursive resistance to the now absent coloniser.
- (b) It unproblematically assumes that the writers who write back to the centre are representing their people of their society authentically.
- (c) The theory downplays the different [sic. difference] between the settler colonial and those colonised in their home territories, using the term “colonised” for both of them. (Mukherjee, A. 1996, p. 15)

Similarly, Harish Trivedi has also given extremely valid arguments about the continuity of the West’s hegemony in colonial and post-

colonial periods. He argues that the post-colonial theory is an attempt to “whitewash the horrors of colonialism as if they had never been, and a scheme to see the history of a large part of the world as divided into two neat and sanitised compartments, the pre-colonial and the post-colonial (Trivedi 1996, p. 235). The major difference between the formation of post-colonial theory and other Western theories about its civilisational others is the degree of political self-consciousness it attaches to itself, but it is not, like other fields of knowledge free from its generalisations, homogenisations and celebratory cant. Moreover, as a field of study, post-colonial theory does not operate independent of the economies and institutions that control and regulate fields of knowledge and the vested interests of those who have more power to influence the discursive formations of a field. For example, the patronage that certain writers receive at global level is almost directly proportionate to the size of the publishing house that markets their books and the local and international prizes that these writers receive. Harish Trivedi gives the example of Salman Rushdie who with “the publication of *Midnight’s Children* (or more accurately, with the award to it of the Booker prize) in 1981...has remained the foremost, almost emblematic, post-colonial writer” (Ibid., p. 232).

On the other hand, the writers whose books are published by local publishers or local subsidiaries of international publishers have to travel a long trajectory for global recognition, which means Western recognition, and canonisation. Sarang’s collection of short stories has been published by Penguin India and is only available within India because of vicissitudes of (in)visible gods of consumerism and market-place and, therefore has received only one or two reviews

and absolutely no theoretical contextualisation (See primary texts in bibliography). Harish Trivedi has remarked that if asked about three or four works that effectively represent post-coloniality in India, he would name two Hindi novels, "*Maila Anchal* (1954) by Phanishwarnath Renu and *Raag Darbari* (1969) by Shrilal Shukla" and "fictional-satirical sketches" by Harishankar Parsai and the six volumes of poetry of Raghuvir Sahay (Ibid., pp. 239-240) but because no First World post-colonial theorist has recognised and/or theorised the post-colonial potential of these works, these works and their creators have not been granted an entry in the dominant post-colonial discourse. Breon Mitchell, the co-translator of Sarang's fiction from Marathi into English, has remarked that the position of Sarang in post-colonial discourse is a curious one because his stay in America for his Ph.D., teaching in Basra, Bombay and now Kuwait have made him a true international writer rather than a post-colonial one (1996, Personal correspondence). Professor Mitchell's statement asks us to re-think the relationship between Indian literature and post-colonial theory because post-colonial theory, because of its fixation with the centre and the periphery, does not have the flexibility that is required to accommodate rhizomatic itineraries of writers like Vilas Sarang. As Arun Mukherjee has also remarked, the vocabulary of post-colonial theory "is too generalised and too monolithic" (Mukherjee, A. 1996, p. 19).

In order to illustrate the points made above and recuperate the marginalia of post-colonial theory and essentialist ideologies of Indian English Literature, I have chosen to discuss the works of Vilas Sarang. Sarang is a Marathi writer from Maharashtra, India who does not use English as the first and only medium of his literary

productions and whose oeuvre does not address or 'write back' to the absent colonisers or indigenous elite at all.

CHAPTER 2

Erasing significations:

One should remember that while fighting against monsters, one should not become a monster.

— Nietzsche

Vilas Govind Sarang was born at Karwar on the Western coast of India in 1942. He was a professor of English at the University of Bombay where he was also the Chair of Department of English before his departure to Kuwait University in 1992. Sarang holds a Ph.D. from the University of Bombay where his doctoral thesis was on the poetry of W.H. Auden and he also holds a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from Indiana University where his doctoral thesis was on the stylistics of literary translation between English and Marathi. A self-translator and bilingual writer, Sarang is situated in the in-betweenness of English, a reminder of India's colonial past, and Marathi, the first medium of his literary creations. He wrote his first short story "Flies" in English in 1963 and later translated it into Marathi for publication in a Marathi journal *Abhirruchi* (1965) edited by Dilip Chitre, another experimentalist and member of the avant-garde on the Indo-Anglian literary scene of Maharashtra.

A collection of his poems, some of which were originally written in Marathi and then translated into English, titled *A Kind of Silence* was published by the Writers Workshop Calcutta in 1978. Poems in this book clearly evince Sarang's distance from the traditional Marathi middle-class literature and affiliation with other avant-gardist writers like Arun Kolatkar and Dilip Chitre who are

also from Maharashtra and also write in English. Sarang's poems describe decadent urban life which is in stark contrast to the kind of poetry that traditional poets write. The influences on these experimental writers are both native and foreign: Tukaram and Namdev as well as Rilke and Beckett. Where a traditional nativist poet would eulogise

Beauties of nature, human striving, it is all here,
It surfaces within me, overflows, with renewed vigour
(Anil 1992, p. 842)

Sarang would write:

Holding my thing between
scissors of fingers
I stand in the urinal
nothing happens.
(Sarang 1978, p. 28)

The excitement and the spirit of rebellion of this avant-gardism soon lost its gusto as Marathi literature reverted to older, populist modes. Sarang calls it "cultural fundamentalism" (Sarang 1994a, p. 311). In the regressive movement of Marathi literature, even the most avant-garde writer like Bhalchandra Namade turned to "rural literature" and soon Chitre, Kolatkar and Sarang were being criticised as blind followers of Western culture. Sarang sees the nativist trend of Marathi literature as "retrograde, hidebound and perniciously limiting" and a movement of the people who are afraid of facing global realities (Ibid., p. 310). Although his own poetry looks like a private and passive rendition of the sordid daily detail, Sarang's work is not devoid of political import. Apart from its implicit rejection of comfortably polite verse in either English or Marathi, it is accompanied by an engagement with the activism of the Dalit

movement. His choice of the Dalit poet that he has translated reflects his commitment with their movement:

Yesterday they have announced
that they will weed out the cactus;
Yesterday they have announced
that they will free out feet;
Yesterday they have announced
that they will give us a few mouthfuls of water.

(Kamble 1992. Translated by Sarang)

In the poem "Counterpricked," one man tells about his inability to pass urine "Holding my thing between/ scissors of fingers/ I stand in the urinal/nothing happens/ a line of men/ waits behind me/ impatiently" (Sarang 1978, p. 28). The romantic idea of a healthy male body is replaced with a dysfunctional body and another poem talks about incomplete / disappearing bodies "Legs fall away, words break away" (Ibid., p. 30) and "on the deserted beach a man defecates/ crouched under umbrella" (Ibid., p. 34). The nihilist images of urban squalor used in these poems are not free from political implications but in one poem titled "Belize: May 1973" the political consciousness of Sarang becomes evident when he talk about "A paltry remnant of an extinguishing empire: "British Honduras," soon to be "Belize"" and a woman named Matilda says about the British soldiers "We like them...they built us the hospital" but the narrator asks "How shall one live/ in such a country? What should one/ take oneself for?" (Ibid., p. 37). Despite all the images of the absurdity of human existence, Sarang remains a politically conscious writer who interrogates the authority of states and repressive regimes in his writings. His writings have the same politically disruptive potential as Kafka's writings had.

Stories from the underground:

The first short story in *Fair Tree of the Void* titled “Musk Deer” sets the mode of the entire collection in the book. It is difficult to tell whether this story is about the umbilical abscess of the narrator or his omphaloskepsis as a means of understanding his past and present life. The story opens with the narrator’s discovery of some wetness in his navel one morning and he wonders if he is “turning into a musk deer or something” (Sarang 1990, p. 15). The Musk Deer is the agent of Waghmare who owns twenty-seven beggars and Musk Deer collects the Waghmare’s share from the beggars and in return of his services to Waghmare he does not pay the rent for his small room on the ground floor.

The story is an intermingling of different narratives that are framed by the master-narrative of the Musk Deer. At twenty-six, he contemplates his infected body: “I finished school, graduated from college, went to work for a living, and all these years my umbilical cord has never been properly severed” (Ibid., p. 16). This revelation changes his view of life. Musk Deer’s birthplace is same as Sarang’s own and Musk Deer carries not a single memory of it: “His birthplace was just a name” (Ibid.). Like most of the characters in Sarang’s fiction, he does not evince any sense of loss over not being able to remember anything about his birthplace. Nostalgia for origin is not the forte of these characters; they live their lives in the middle without teleology or anamnesis. Like the tramps of Samuel Beckett,

these characters find themselves in the middle of the stage of life or, in Deleuze and Guattari's terms, their lives are made of middles (*milieu*), The Tree of the Void becomes something more changeable than a firmly rooted growth:

A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*. The tree is filiation, the rhizome is alliance...Where are you going? Where are you coming from? What are you heading for? These are useless questions. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p. 25)

Musk Deer is also living his life in the middle of the circuits of Bombay's roads, reviewing books for a journal to earn his living and chasing beggars to pay for his small room. Like other characters, he thinks ideas that do not lead anywhere, but it is difficult to tell the difference between stasis and movement because of the intensity of their cerebration. Sarang's characters roam around in Bombay and describe their surroundings with details that do not construct a homogenised idea of their surroundings— we find a pure celebration of senses and collection of sensory impressions. When Musk Deer roams around in search of Narayan, a beggar boy who reminds him of his lost twin, he takes account of a lot of unconnected details:

He saw a small boy pressing his nose against the glass of a show-window...He saw a woman on the second floor of a building shut the window...He saw a dog sniffing the dirt on a garbage heap, and another dog sniffing the first dog's behind. He saw a man in a red shirt come out of a restaurant...Downtown at dawn, passing by the rows of beggars and vagrants sleeping in front of office buildings, he saw a boy masturbating. He saw the wrapper of a loaf of Britannia bread on the sidewalk. He saw the unhooked strap of a woman's bra inside her

bodice...But he did not see Narayan. (Sarang 1990, p. 25)

Another beggar named Bansi Lal suffers from leprosy and lives off the meat a crow brings to his shack from Parsis' Tower of Silence, and the Musk Deer remarks: "Bansi Lal was happy. He was getting a good meal without much effort. Things were fine as long as Parsis were dying" (Ibid., p. 22). The crow brings Bansi Lal the dead human meat which Bansi Lal, after cooking, offers to the crow as well and the crow has developed a taste for the human flesh that Bansi Lal cooks.

Death and putrescence amid the hustle-bustle of life and the dependence of the living on the dead are recurring motifs in Sarang's short stories. The popular Hindu beliefs of re-incarnation and metempsychosis do not appear and neither do the moral teachings associated with them. Bajrang in "Bajrang ~ the Great Indian Bustard" meets his beloved Shalini in a cemetery along the beach:

Bajrang liked to sit by this wall partly because it reminded him of a passage by Albert Camus, in which he spoke of Algerian boys and girls having assignations under the cemetery walls. It was thrilling to know that Bombay, together with a distant city like Algiers, contributed towards love's triumph over death. Bajrang saw a vision of cemeteries all over the world besieged by passionate youth. (Ibid., p. 31)

A lover in Bombay who is a travelling salesman experiences greatness through association with all the passionate youth of the world. Later, his friend Kanchan comes to inform him that Kanchan's mother has died and they have built a funeral pyre. In the cold evening, Bajrang

enjoys the warmth when the pyre is aflame and wonders “they might have killed this woman so they could warm themselves on a cold day. He could see their faces gratified by the warmth of the fire (Ibid., p. 33). In reducing the response of his characters to this key sign of Hindu cultural identity to mere bodily warmth, Sarang moves the reader towards an absurdist or nihilist view of life that refuses or transcends social rituals and cultural values. Bajrang is not different from Bansi Lal as their bodies receive heat and sustenance from the dead bodies of others. Narayan in “Musk Deer” philosophises about the whole chain of being and his stoical acceptance of the fact of living off others because “All one can do is live off someone. I live off people, Waghmare lives off us, you live off him. Why bother about anything else?” (Ibid., p. 26). They are all thriving on putrescence and rotten flesh and they do not find any reason to complain. The protagonist of the story “The Phonemate” knows that his phonemate in an American hostel has committed suicide but he does not inform the authorities and keeps on living his daily routine life with the dead body of his phonemate in the other room: “I look through the phone-box five or six times a day. As if I am worried Alfredo will ascend bodily to heaven!” (Ibid., p. 169).

Sarang’s short stories deliberately narrativise what is normally excluded, marginalised or erased in mainstream narratives. These narratives do not have an end in view and their development is unlike the linear and monolithic unfolding of grand récits. Sarang’s short stories do not progress towards an end but are the narratives without beginnings and ends because “When an end is defined, other ends are rejected, and one might not know what those ends are...Can we know what is left out?” (Spivak 1990, pp. 18-19). These short

stories are home to that material of life which is rejected by mainstream narratives of familial and bourgeois values — narratives of possession and loss, narratives of progress, desire and nostalgia and lack. Badve's remark that the short stories of R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao and Khushwant Singh, are at best "good traditional entertaining short stories with an emphasis on plot and character or the exotic local colour of the Indian landscape" (Badve 1990, p. 337) makes it clear how Sarang differs from the writers who cater for mainstream readership. For example, the dominant idea of respect for one's elders in Indian society which is authorised by almost all the religions of India is reflected in Anita Desai's story "A Devoted Son" which describes lavishly the filial obedience of the protagonist:

When the results appeared in the morning papers, Rakesh scanned them, barefoot and in his pyjamas at the garden gate, then went up the stairs to the veranda where his father sat sipping his morning tea and bowed down to touch his feet. (Desai 1983, p. 101)

In contrast to Anita Desai's depiction of respect for elders, Sarang has recuperated whatever is excluded in a construction of the idea of respectable old age in "Bajrang ~ the Great Indian Bustard." When Bajrang is sitting against the cemetery wall, he watches an old man who goes to the sea after evacuating his bowels to clean himself. The old man lowers his buttocks to wash when the waves break on the beach and Bajrang is amused

to watch the old man alternately lowering or raising his buttocks as if he were engaged in a physical exercise, or practising the motions of a dance, or as though he were a puppet moved by invisible strings. (Sarang 1990, p. 31)

Adil Jussawala has remarked about the significance of this strategy of Sarang that “He breaks open the glass case in which the precious icon is housed, and, like Dostoyevsky’s nihilist in *The Possessed*, substitutes it with a rat...his aggressive use of it can be repellent” (Jussawala 1990, p. 10). The rituals that play an important part in Indian religious life also undergo the same treatment. In “A Revolt of Gods,” the Ganesh festival turns into a surreal and bizarre event. All the figures of the pot-bellied elephant god Ganesh rise from their plinths and hand-carts and walk away. Later, the narrator sees them disappearing in the sea and wonders “Why had they risen up? Were they returning because they had failed to achieve some objective? Perhaps they had decided to leave the affairs of men to men themselves” (Sarang 1990, p. 59). The gods that Raja Rao and others had used to construct a nationalist concept of Indianness simply stand up and walk away without any reason and later they are seen disappearing in the sea and human beings are left wondering and there is no answer to their questions. The image of disappearing gods and the abyss that opens after their disappearance as human beings are left alone to deal with their affairs is a profound and disturbing philosophical statement and has the same political implications in a dominant Hindu society that Nietzsche’s famous dictum “God is dead” had in Western Christian tradition.

Another Hindu ideal that undergoes the same nihilist treatment is the ideal of goddess-woman. In “An Interview with M. Chakko,” Chakko, the protagonist, after a shipwreck reaches an island named Lorzan where all the women possess half bodies, either lower or upper half - and the only means of reproduction is the test-tube method. Chakko ends up in Lorzan when he is in his late teens

and spends all his youth in Lorzan and comes back in his middle age when he has become accustomed to seeing only half women:

I simply stared at every women I saw, whether she was beautiful or not. Then I went to a whore. I told her to undress, sat down and stared at her. Then I went nearer and stroked her all over gently. (Ibid., p. 97)

After getting used to the sight of normal bodies of women, Chakko marries Lakshmi but gradually grows dissatisfied with his wife because “I didn’t like the idea of women with whole bodies” (Ibid.) and cuts his wife into two halves. Adil Jussawala has pointed out that, in this story, Sarang has snapped the “Hindu male perception” into two halves (Jussawala 1990, p. 10) and, with this the female goddesses Kali and Shakti are also torn into two halves. Badve has remarked that both “A Revolt of Gods” and “An Interview with M. Chakko” use the genre of fantasy in order to “make comments of a social and political nature” and in “A Revolt of Gods” Sarang has employed the comic as well but it is “not for the purpose of humour” but to pass judgement on “what people do to Gods in the name of Gods.” A character in “A Revolt of Gods” remarks “True, Lord Ganesh is called *lambodara* — ‘pot-bellied’ but how many sins can you expect him to swallow (Badve 1990, p. 345). This remark suggests that Sarang’s work is concerned with the social realities and is potentially political despite its apparent pre-occupation with the bizarre and the absurd only.

Another short story “Testimony of an Indian Vulture” criticises the way different religions attach different values to different kinds of food and how the idea of impure body that nourishes on some “impure” food according to the respective belief systems generates hatred and alienation. The story is told in the first-

person by a vulture whose left wing is disabled after a boy hurled a stone in its direction and the vulture comments:

The man had no reason to throw the stone that rendered one of my wings practically useless. That's the sort of thing you humans do — and yet you complain about the irrationality of the universe. (Ibid., p. 154)

The vulture decides to go to a bird hospital that is run by a doctor who is a follower of the Jain sect but the hospital is only open to herbivorous birds. When the doctor sees the vulture, he shouts “We don't take in birds of your kind” (Sarang 1990, p. 157). The vulture tries to convince the doctor by resorting to the Hindu idea of *maya* that asserts that the world as we experience it in our lives is an illusion. The vulture says to the doctor that “Pigeons and sparrows eat grain, while we eat flesh — it is all maya, all illusion. Everything is one at the bottom of this world of illusion” (Ibid.) but the doctor turns away the vulture. Back on his perch the vulture is filled with sadness and worried about human society as well because the vulture believes that “no other country in the world is divided into those who eat meat and those who don't. It is most unfortunate. Tell me, what hope can you have for a country where food divides people?” (Sarang 1990, p. 158). The vulture sits there waiting for his death and, following the popular Hindu belief of reincarnation and *karma*, wonders about its next incarnation and wishes not to be reborn in the same country as a human being. The final paragraph of the short story describes a very sombre picture of the Indian landscape:

The sky is darkening rapidly. It is one of those immemorial Indian evenings. There is no sign of the moon anywhere. Perhaps she will rise late, or perhaps it is the night of the dark moon. Gazing upon the emptiness

of the plain at this sombre hour an unaccustomed sense of peace steals over me. I have a feeling that it may be on this dark night that my soul will take wing, soaring high and free in the sky. (Ibid., p. 158)

In this story, Sarang uses the genre of animal fable to make a scathing criticism of the ways in which human beings have created invisible barriers and divisions and the violence that results from ideological differences is used in almost the same manner as in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*.

The political nature of his work is also apparent in the three short stories that he wrote while he was in Iraq (Preface to Sarang 1993). "The Terrorist," "Return" and "Kalluri's Radio" all describe a claustrophobic and eerie atmosphere without mentioning Iraq at all. "The Terrorist" is a story of a person who keeps wondering about an uprising and who is having a secret correspondence with someone named Joseph George and, because of the censorship of their mail, both of them keep adding fantastical stories and imaginary characters and the protagonist-narrator describes his daily routine as if he were plotting something against the government but, at the end of the story, it all turns out to be a figment of his mind:

I've never joined a plot, have seldom received any mail, and have nothing of consequence in the brown paper bag at the bottom of my trunk. As I spent my life in the south making few friends and shunning relatives, I'm now living in the north, stuck with a dull job and caught up in confused dreams of love and freedom, like hundreds of other people. (Sarang 1990, p. 153)

Of the three stories, "Return" is the most Kafkaesque in its evocation of bureaucratic oppression and labyrinthine processes of enquiries which reminds the reader of Kafka's novel *The Trial*. The boundaries between reality and dream are totally removed and it is difficult for the reader to know where the narrative is leaving the everyday world behind and entering the realm of Borgesian and Kafkaesque imagination. The story opens with Sudhir's dream that he is suffering from insomnia. He has been a student in the US for eight years and is now returning to India when there is dictatorship in India. The new government has asked the students to come back and promised political clemency. But when Sudhir returns, he is questioned by immigration authorities and they ask him to remain in the Inquiry Block which is described as "a sort of hotel" by one of the officers (Sarang 1990, p. 138). He is ushered into a room where he finds it difficult to go to sleep and realises that it is the same room as the one he has been dreaming about in his dreams of insomnia and thinks that he is dreaming the same dream again. Early in the morning, a little while before four o' clock, a man comes in and says that they want to ask a few questions and Sudhir thinks "This dream is becoming too complicated" and wonders whether "he should scream out loud so that he could wake up, and free himself from the clutches of the dream, then get up and see how close they were to London" (Ibid., p. 140). Sarang's use of the borderline between insomnia and dreaming and a claustrophobic world brings is very effective in portraying the oppression that results from officialdom.

"Kalluri's Radio," is the story of a village which is not very different from Macondo in Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* because "Scarcely anyone ever left the village, and

practically no one ever came” (Ibid., p. 121) but Kalluri leaves the village and comes back with a radio which is the most wonderful object anybody in the village has ever seen:

the box made a sound as if it was clearing its throat, and suddenly spoke in a human voice...The box spoke for a while in a female voice and then started singing...The singing was beautiful — so different from the songs sung at village festivals. (Ibid., pp. 122-123)

Sarang has used the radio as an instrument which makes the people of the village realise that geographical divisions are not always because the people of different areas speak different languages. People listen to different broadcasts on the radio which are coming from Shufaristan and Khauradesh. The reality as perceived by the “simple hill folk,” which modern civilisation would consider as fantasy, is employed to make political statements which comment on the absurdity of divisions between different countries on linguistic and religious basis. The two fictitious countries Shufaristan and Khauradesh that are described in the story bear strong resemblance to Pakistan and India: “Khauradesh and Shufaristan speak the same language, as you know. That language is called Khaurabhasha in our country; in Shufaristan, however, it goes by the name of Rufidi” (Ibid., p. 124). This is a reference to the difference between Hindi and Urdu as their major difference is their script only. The capital of Shufaristan is named Hakimabad which bears strong phonic resemblance to Pakistan’s capital Islamabad; Shufaristan literally means “the land of unlawful recommendations and nepotism” and Hakimabad means “the dwelling/town of rulers” which is true of Islamabad as it is a capital city that did not emerge out of social processes but out of official paper-work. Though Sarang wrote the

story during his stay in Iraq (1974-1979) and the names Shufaristan and Khauradesh are obvious references to India and Pakistan, the story can be about any geographical area that has been divided on political reason. The fable-like structure of the narrative makes the story applicable to any political division between human beings and the absurdity and irrationality that results from such situations. Sarang's political consciousness is not limited to India only as Abhijit remarks in "Return" "What makes India so special anyway? Look at the foreign students here — Africans, Latin Americans, the ones from the Middle East, and from South-East Asia — in practically everyone's country there's dictatorship of one kind or another" (Ibid., p. 133).

Sarang is not only conscious of the political situation at the global level, he is also aware of the life of ordinary middle-class secretarial staff in government and semi-government offices and how their bodies are inscribed by the large power structures and, in Foucauldian terms, labour is extracted from their bodies and their bodies diminish in size and human significance — a recurring theme in Kafka's writings. "The Life and Death of Manu" and "Anil Rao's Metamorphosis" are two very Kafkaesque stories. Manu in "The Life and Death of Manu" is the diminished body of a telephone attendant that he has to run between the mouthpiece and the earpiece in order not to miss a word of the boss. The human dignity that is associated with stature and growth is denied to Manu in his job and "with weary limbs and swollen eyes he made the rounds between the mouthpiece and the earpiece. Only with reluctance did the man allow him a few hours for food and rest" (Ibid., p. 163). Ironically, the boss is also fond of philosophising about Self, phallus

and anus. Manu has not much to contribute to this kind of conversation and listens attentively to the man on the other side of the phone. Manu has to walk cautiously on the telephone handle as the receiver lies on the desk top on its back and all efforts of Manu to turn the receiver to its side so that he can walk on the desk top rather than the handle have failed and “Manu had to accept things as they were” (Ibid., p. 160). Badve has pointed out that, in “The Life and Death of Manu,” Sarang has described

the labyrinthine world of industrial and business management in the corporate sector in the metropolitan cities of today...to highlight the silent tortures suffered by the subordinates in the new economic systems of the industrial and commercial organisations...The Lilliputian figure of Manu is simply an emotional correlative to express the clerical or secretarial life of those who work in their offices from ten-thirty to five-thirty. The job, of course, is to dance to the tune of their invisible masters. (Badve 1990, p. 345)

The image of a dehumanised body of Manu who dies after falling into the mouthpiece of the telephone handle because the plastic covering is broken haunts the reader for a long time like the image of the insect named Gregor Samsa. After Manu’s death in the mouthpiece, two men arrive. The men are wearing heavy woollen overcoats and the belts of their overcoats are tightly strapped. Sarang hints at the origin of such brutal officialdom with the help of their Northern European manner of dressing in a tropical country:

It was rather odd, to say the least, to go about in such dress in a tropical country. It was as though the men wanted to preserve in their heart the great and bitter cold of the country from which they had come. (Sarang 1990, p. 164)

Their hearts are associated with bitter cold and their manner of picking Manu's dead body is also cold and inhuman because one man "lifted Manu's body out and held it in his palm. He stared at it for a few seconds and then dropped it inside the left pocket of his overcoat and buttoned the pocket" (Ibid.) Manu's body is also human in its form but he does not have the human dignity that is associated with the 'normal' size of human body.

The story titled "Anil Rao's Metamorphosis" describes the metamorphosis of Anil Rao into a gigantic penis. The existential aspects of this story are discussed below. But a brief outline of the story is necessary to establish the political potential of Sarang's work. Though the story can be described as an Indian version of Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, there are many crucial differences between them. The major difference between *The Metamorphosis* and "Anil Rao's Metamorphosis" is the point of view of the narrator: *The Metamorphosis* is told by a third-person omniscient narrator; whereas, "Anil Rao's Metamorphosis" is told in the first-person by the protagonist-narrator Anil Rao. Another major difference is the readiness of Anil Rao to accept his metamorphosis; whereas, Gregor Samsa tries to go back to sleep with the hope of "forgetting all this nonsense" (Kafka 1972, p. 3):

In 'The Metamorphosis of Anil Rao' [sic.] the protagonist accepts his overnight transformation into a penis with the same equanimity as the other characters in other stories accept their impotent lives (Jussawala 1990, p. 11).

After the first sentence which informs the reader about the metamorphosis of the first-person narrator, Anil Rao starts describing his new form of being just as all other characters of Sarang relish in meticulous and prosaic description of their circumstances with a characteristic detached observation. Gregor Samsa tries to find a reason for his transformation; Anil Rao starts living and describing his new life. Gregor Samsa remembers his miserable life as a travelling salesman:

I've got the torture of traveling, [sic.] worrying about changing trains, eating miserable food at all hours, constantly seeing new faces, no relationships that last or get more intimate. (Kafka 1972, p. 4)

In contrast to Gregor Samsa's effort at finding the reason for his suffering, Anil Rao gets involved in learning to live in his new form:

I gathered all my strength and flung myself out of bed. The covers flew off, and my bottom hit the floor, I swayed unsteadily for a few moments, then remained upright on the floor. I stood there for a while observing my room. (Sarang 1990, p. 100)

Though, as Adil Jussawala has also remarked (Jussawala 1990), many readers will find Sarang's writings modelled after Kafka but Sarang's writings bear an unmistakable Indianness about them which is different from the received images of Indianness in Indian English literature: Brahminical high culture, rural poverty or exotic difference. As Borges reformulated famous tales of the world in his writings and created a literature about literature, Sarang is also creating an Indian labyrinth of literature where canonicity can lose its face. His characters, to recapture a phrase from Macaulay, are 'Indian in blood and colour' and their narratives are also Indian in

setting and atmosphere and they reappropriate local and Western stories. Shiva and Vishnu meet a Kafkaesque narrative and both undergo a transformation, creating a new synthesis where East, West, Judaism, Hinduism, minorities and majorities cannot preserve the lineaments of their faces. It is the politics of nomadic thought that derives its power from erasure of boundaries and this politics is radically different from the postmodern politics of endless deferral and dispersion of all narratives.

Another dominant theme that lends a subversive touch to Sarang's stories is the theme of boredom. Sarang's characters are not afraid of boredom, rather they embrace it and, with the acceptance of boredom as an unavoidable fact of life, their actions, whether performed in front of others or alone, become independent of teleology and meanings. Their actions become pure actions — actions for their own sake — or in Deleuzian and Guattarian terms, movement for the sake of movement, only *gress* which is free from *progress* and *regress* (Arthur 1989, p. 38) — the actions that are not appropriated or contained by any grand national or nationalist narrative. The only character of "Flies," the first short story of Sarang, spends his day reading books or maiming flies. In the story he tells the reader about the flies that he has killed in the past. Memory, nostalgia, remembrance, beginnings, origins and originality are all employed to serve a narrative about flies, the creatures who do not know the difference between "virtue and wickedness" (Sarang 1990, p. 69).

In the 'order' of natural creatures, flies, mosquitoes, cockroaches and vultures are like the untouchables that are excluded

from the supposedly transhistorical narratives of love, development, progress and liberty and they are generally associated with decadence and rottenness. The narrator of “Flies” is also aware of the significance that is attached to human actions and remarks in an ironical tone that

Killing flies has never been my principal ambition. It was only to facilitate my reading that I took to killing flies. And although it is true that killing flies did in itself hamper my reading to some extent, it was a lot better than trying to read with flies buzzing around you. (Ibid., p. 70)

The narrator has also, although in an ironical tone, resorted to explaining the utilitarian motive behind his killing flies but the last two sentences of the story bring another ‘useless’ action in the narrative: “After supper, I go to bed directly for a sound sleep. I don’t masturbate much nowadays” (Ibid., p. 70). The last sentence of the story leaves the reader wondering about the relationship between killing flies, reading, boredom and masturbation. The figure of boredom is situated at the crossroads of effectivity of labour and pleasures of leisure, displacing both.

Similarly, the protagonist of the story titled “The Spider in the Clock” does not have any particular reason behind his actions. His actions stand outside the symbolic order as if they were mocking at ‘human rationality’. The protagonist of the story wakes up in his room in order to write down the dream he has dreamt but before writing down anything on paper remembers that he has to wind the clock. He discovers a spider on the dial of the clock and starts torturing the spider by rotating the hands of the clock. After some

time, he realises that he no longer knows what time it actually is because he has been rotating the hands of the clock for so long. He decides to accept the time the hands of the clock are showing: “All it needed was a moment’s decision...No argument, no misgivings. An act of faith” (Ibid., p. 86). The idea does not work because he is aware that it is a lie he has told to himself. Not knowing what to do, he performs some actions that are devoid of any signification: “I waved my arms in the dark, for no reason. I didn’t even see them. I knew only because they were my arms” (Ibid., p. 87).

The systems of significations, the law of the father, the *logos* of reason and the coercion of the archival order of human acts fail to categorise the actions of this and many other protagonists of Sarang’s stories and this is where the true emancipatory potential of Sarang’s writings lies. His characters seize the power of interpretation from the symbolic order and replace it with silence, chaos, absurdity and disorder. The only characteristic of these characters that makes them appear less violent and disruptive is their equanimity with which they perform and live their many subversions. The historian in “The History is on Our Side” has written a book of history by combing several histories of different countries (Ibid.). The protagonist of “The Departure” looks at an ashtray in darkness through the burning tip of a cigarette and notes: “It had never occurred to me that a cigarette can be a source of light” (Ibid., p. 187).

All of the stories create a collage of human actions that defies authority of originary consciousness and foregrounds a disjunctured human body that is a site of discontinuities, ruptures, fissures, differences and multiplicities: a body sheds all the other organs and

becomes only a penis; another body is miniaturised and dies by falling into a telephone receiver's mouthpiece. The oppression of linear narratives of dignity, purpose, love, progress of the master-self is replaced by repetitive, meandering and cyclical narratives and movements of the other that celebrates its freedom from linearity.

Vilas Sarang's novel *In the Land of Enki* (1993) is a very politically conscious novel which employs Iraq's totalitarian regime as its setting to discuss the issues of individual freedom, identity and the futility of human choices in the face of despotic forces and the absurd origins of human civilisation. Sarang says that he has not mentioned the ruling party or president of Iraq because

It was not my intention in this novel to run down the particular regime in Iraq...I regard the Iraqi situation as a universal condition, as the image of a fundamental human predicament. (Sarang 1993, Preface)

In the Land of Enki tells the story of an Indian student named Pramod who comes to the United States to do his Ph.D. and, like many migrants from the Third World to the First World, he is disillusioned with the American/Western society but also remembers how he used to feel equally uncomfortable with his place of origin. He remembers that in India he always used to have the feeling that he would not be able to have "any genuine relationships" there (Ibid., p. 6). But after coming to the States, he realises that he had foolishly pinned all his hopes on Western society: "he hadn't asked himself why he thought he could achieve in another country what he hadn't at home" (Ibid.).

His hope of finding a utopia in the West “starts to crumble” and soon he finds that his relationships with others are “beginning to prove as unsatisfactory” as they were in India. He starts to find faults with American characteristics. Once, his American girlfriend Joanne buys some artichoke hearts and, without offering them to Pramod, starts eating them. Coming from a society where eating one’s food in the presence of others without offering them is considered evil, selfish and mean, he is hurt, but he also remembers that at home he was also unhappy about the Indian practice of forcing food upon others: “The odd thing was that although Pramod found such incidents disillusioning, precisely the opposite behaviour used to infuriate him in India” (Ibid.).

Pramod becomes the figure of an unhappy migrant, exile or nomad. It is at this stage of his narrative that he becomes aware of the futility of his desire for meaning, identity, roots and territorialisation:

He has been unhappy in India. Now he was disillusioned with life in America. What was he to do? Go back to India, or reconcile himself to his situation and stay where he was?...he did not want to go back to India. But he also knew that if he married and settled down in the USA, he would never really fit into American society. (Ibid., p. 8)

It is his nomadic thought that prevents him from territorialising himself in any particular geographical or State boundary and makes him question the nature of human relationships and happiness that are no longer authentic as the bodies, opinions and actions of the people around him are inscribed by their different cultures. He does not want to live among rooted people who belong to any particular

society without being conscious of the way in which that society has authorised, inscribed, prescribed and contained their very existence. When he thinks of the teaching position in Rockford, “a small midwestern town where well-to-do, middle-class Americans lived comfortable, quiet orderly lives” (Ibid.), he gives up the idea. He cannot territorialise himself among the people who are “never at odds with life in any real sense” (Ibid.). An offer of a job from Basra University in Iraq gives him an opportunity to draw a new itinerary. In accordance with the nomadology of Deleuze and Guattari, Pramod draws itineraries and maps rather than roots and plants. Disillusioned with America and disgusted with India, he finds Iraq an attractive place, not because it is a Muslim country or an oil-producing country but because that region has been ‘the cradle of human civilisation’ and he hopes that this could be “one way out of his predicament. To run away from the problem was also a way of solving it” (Ibid., p. 9). The only aim of his journey to Iraq becomes the act of “running away” — movement for the sake of movement. He is a perfect nomad. In the words of his American girlfriend Joanne, people like Pramod “‘always hanker after some strange, distant land, thinking that they’ll find what they’ve been looking for’”(Ibid., p. 11); but he is not looking for any thing he just wants to go away from the place of his origin and the place that has been the target of his desire when he was in the place of his origin. Now he has realised that his predicament does not have a solution in any particular territory — rather the solution is in “running away.”

Pramod is also questioning his own feelings, emotions and different psychic states and, like other characters in Sarang’s short stories, he creates the same feeling of stasis by answering his own

questions and stretching different answers to their absurd limits. He leaves America and comes to Iraq and feels as if he is 'homesick' for America and then questions his own feelings: "Was it possible to feel homesick for a foreign country?" (Ibid., p. 18).

The third-person omniscient narrator tells the reader about the changes that have taken place in Pramod's life because of Pramod's travels to different lands in an indifferent manner that is the most noticeable characteristic of Sarang's narrators: "In Bombay he used Binaca in a blue tube; then in the States he used Crest in a red and white one. That is how things change" (Ibid., p. 19). Like the narratives of countless people who leave their home countries for one reason or another, the narrative of Pramod's life is also marked by changes that are very subtle but very potent. Pramod's habit of questioning everything makes these changes lose their strength and helps him maintain the stasis that his life has become. In his nomadic life, thought maintains its speed in its most sedentary moments. His questions are his strategy for interrupting the linear chain of significations and making them run in circles — like myths rather than histories.

His visit to the Indian club in Basra makes him realise that the members of the club have created a small-scale India in Basra and, even there, they maintain the old hostilities between North Indians and South Indians and he decides to keep away from their activities. Though he is a political person, he does not find interest in the kind of politics that obtain in the Indian club. He is concerned with the more fundamental or profound questions than the conflict of North Indians and South Indians. He wants to write a monograph and he

has decided on a title as well: *On Identity*. He has been thinking that being at equal distance from India and America will help him write more objectively about the problem of identity from his particular point of view. He is waiting impatiently for the trunk of books he shipped from America before coming to Iraq. The trunk is full of philosophical books and a typewriter.

Most of Pramod's acquaintances/friends are also the people who have come to Iraq in order to pursue different goals: Maria Nazar is an American woman who has married an Iraqi man; Francois Didier, a Lebanese-Frenchman who teaches French at Basra University; Sharma, Hameed and Mukherjee are from India. His relationship with Maria is based on convenience and some shared leftist leanings. When Maria shows some interest in Indian culture, Pramod's response shows how global capitalism intervenes in the production of indigenous peoples' knowledge of their indigeneity: "Much of my knowledge of Indian culture comes from books like this Penguin edition here — from books printed in England and America. It's odd, I suppose" (Ibid., p. 61).

Since the principal reason behind Pramod's journey to Iraq is the hope of attaining some deeper truth about human society by exploring the remnants of ancient Mesopotamia (described as 'the cradle of human civilisation'), his quest is of an originary nature but what he finds during his visit to the ziggurat of Eridu is a hollow centre where only desert dust reigns supreme:

Pramod sat there, in the middle of broken bricks, in the centre of the dry, barren land. The wind whistled in his ears. Dust blew against him unceasingly...An unknown

wind coming from the distant emptiness was blowing away the dust of history...The distance between India and America, between human beings, complexities of a thousand kinds, had become meaningless in the blowing wind. (Ibid., p. 81)

When Pramod comes down from the ziggurat, his friend Francois, who has been waiting in the car, asks him what divine message he has brought and Pramod's reply is, "Divine message? I have nothing of the sort, I am afraid... All I have brought with me is dust in my face that covers me" (Ibid.) Later, they are stopped by soldiers at a checkpoint and they have a hard time convincing the officers that they were just sight-seeing. The officers are not ready to believe because they think that there is nothing to see and "the mound of eternity that had lifted him [Pramod] to a different plane of being for a short while was fenced off by history" (Ibid.).

The Sumerian civilisation which was once so influential and powerful with its literature, cosmogony and rituals that its traces are still visible in the whole Judaeo-Christian-Islamic tradition (Siren 1994, Hypertext) has got only desert dust blowing through its centres now. The wind whistles as it passes through the hollow ziggurats of all-powerful gods Enki, Ur and Eridu and the representatives of a repressive regime in Iraq declare that there is nothing to see there. The relationship between the repressive regime of Iraq and the ancient Sumerian god Enki is explained by Pramod's companion Mukherjee as

The Sumerian civilisation shows an uncanny resemblance to present times. Their government had a hold on every citizen, all enterprises were communal and there was no room for what you call free enterprise.

The present government of this country calls itself socialist. Describing the system of the Sumerians, one historian used the same word — socialism! (Sarang 1993, p. 133)

Mukherjee's view of history as cyclical and repetitive provides the reader with an interesting and explicative comparison and, at the same time, his interpretation dislodges a positivistic and linear concept of history. Sarang fuses the boundaries of myth and history and makes them indistinguishable from each other.

Pramod's experiences in a totalitarian regime change his view about the whole concept of identity. The original project of writing a monograph on the topic of identity seems to be absurd in a system where you cannot even own a typewriter or an FM radio and the sea is behind the barbed wires. After the arrival of his box of books that also contains his typewriter, he tries to start writing the monograph but he is worried about the typewriter's presence because he has got a typewriter that is not registered with the government. He thinks that his concept of human freedom has been an illusion:

Till now, Pramod had taken such freedom for granted. But it could not be taken for granted. It did not exist in this country, nor could it be assumed to exist in many other countries...He had lived in a state of illusion; he hadn't been aware of the fragility of the foundation of his life. The discovery was unsettling, and it troubled Pramod. (Ibid., p. 129)

His new understanding of human predicament makes him acutely aware of the brutalities of repression, control, oppression and despotism. Mukherjee has made him aware of the fact that "Ideologies are misused and perverted (Ibid., p. 131). His encounter

with the fears of his Kurdish student named Sherwan makes him aware of the paranoia that originates from within a totalitarian regime and he understands that an “ordinary individual, helpless under the shadow of the fist, lived haunted by fear and suspicion” (Ibid., p. 104).

His personal relationships are also inscribed and contained by despotic ideologies: his relationship with Salwa also ends because her father has stopped her from going out of her home; his student Sherwan disappears on the day of his performance in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*; his friend Aqeel commits suicide. In a place “where civilisation originated, the shadow of primitive chaos, confusion and uncertainty reigned” (Ibid., p. 138). His mind yearns for something to hold onto. Coming from a Hindu society that worships stones and statues of different gods, he thinks that his discontent is resulting from the absence of stones in the entire region. In the mud of the confluence of the Euphrates and the Tigris, his mind yearns for some solid exteriority on which to anchor his thoughts.

Sarang has employed the image of a totalitarian god Enki as the central figure at the origins of civilisation to convey the idea that even the concept of human freedom is not free from the clutches of despotic signifiers. From a post-colonial point of view, Sarang has chosen an ancient civilisational site which is associated with the development of all later civilisations. The revisionary potential of his approach reaches to the origin of the civilisation of colonising centre. Colonisers used the Bible and their canonical texts for disseminating their political ideologies in India. The biblical explanation of the origin of universe has its origins in Sumerian mythology: “As in

Genesis, the Sumerians' world is formed out of the watery abyss" (Siren 1994, Hypertext).

The whole myth of creation in the book of Genesis shows an unmistakable influence of Sumerian mythology. Seen in the light of the fact that colonialism forced the Bible upon colonised subjects as the word of God, Sarang's references to Sumerian mythology become very disruptive as they foreground the repressed history of the origin of the Word of colonisers:

The second chapter of Genesis introduces the paradise Eden, a place similar to the Sumerian Dilmun, described in the myth of "Enki and Ninhursag"...Eden "in the East" (Gen. 2: 8) has a river which also "rises" or overflows, to form four rivers including the Tigris and the Euphrates. It too is lush and has fruit bearing trees. (Gen 2: 8) In the second version of the creation of man "The Lord God formed man out of clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being". [sic] Enki and Ninmah (Ninhursag) use a similar method in creation of man. (Ibid., Hypertext)

The post-colonial project of revising the grand narratives of development of civilisation also gains impetus by Sarang's choice of themes and cultural material. Though he does not write back to the Imperial centre for an assertion of his national identity, he has successfully shown that the origins are hollow and the sites of the beginning of grand narratives are full of dust that do not support any solid grounds for the recovery of lost glories. Mukherjee informs him that the great ziggurat and the royal cemetery of Ur is built upon

heaps of rubbish!...The graves of the Sumerian royalty are ancient — and yet, the rubbish is more ancient still!

The Sumerians threw their refuse over the walls of the town, and, generation after generation, the sloping piles of rubbish kept on accumulating. You could exhume and examine the rubbish of centuries! (Ibid., p. 132)

The site that marks the origin of civilisational narratives is built upon "heaps of rubbish" and there is no original/originary moment left except a radical and nihilistic deferral. This strategy of Sarang is at work in almost all of his writings. The technique with which he introduces the thoughts of his characters is also similar to the process through which Pramod has come to realise that his desire of finding something in the middle of the binarism of America and India has lead to the sites where dust blows and graves are built on rubbish and the Euphrates and the Tigris create a primordial mud and the government controls the lives of people.

A conscious critic of nativism, communalism and cultural and religious forms of fundamentalism, Sarang, as a writer, is the person who transgresses all the models and categories available to frame or contain a post-colonial writer. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's statement that most post-colonials are "still quite interested either in proving that they are ethnic subjects and therefore the true marginals or that they are as good as the colonials" (Spivak 1989, p. 290) seems to be an effort at homogenisation when one sees writers like Vilas Sarang, Dilip Chitre and Arun Kolatkar who are neither ethnic subjects nor do they blindly follow the canonical models of the colonial centre and the "great tradition" of Western literature. Sarang is conscious of the political limitations of nationalism, race and nativism which see the world in terms of "Indian-versus-Western dichotomy" and leave no scope for "the writer's individuality and

originality, which may magnificently transcend the parameters of Indianness and Westernisation” (Sarang 1994a, p. 311). Speaking about the subjects that do not find entry in the grand récits of nations, his poems deal with the urban squalor, the images of the city as a space full of cockroaches, urinals, cigarette butts and surrealistic wonder and absurdity. Sometimes it seems that the words and sentences have jettisoned the tyranny of linear thought, history, development and every sentence is the beginning of a new thought that does not lead anywhere because there are no goals. Some lines of the poem “A Kind of Silence” read:

In the morning all will gather at the appointed time.
Some day this chair will turn into dust. Many kinds of
animals will crawl onto the shore. This notebook will be
full. Most of the people trying to cross the street will
reach the other side. All things will become triangular.
(Sarang 1978, p. 14)

The sporadic movement of thought in these lines, depending on the interpretive discourses one prefers, is Dadaist or, in Deleuzian terms, an assemblage of nomadic thought. Whether one chooses to interpret the semiotic field of these lines in surrealist or Deleuzian terms, it is hard to see them or other poems in the book expressing a structured historical and linear outlook common to bourgeois institutionalised (canonical) literature. This remains the case, whether that bourgeois literature is defined by the British Empire and its legacies or by the Maharashtran state, where writers depict the cultural and social landscape of their particular regions and call it ‘rural’ literature. Sarang does not territorialise his thought/language in any particular geographical space and, thus, displaces the traditional structures of thought, as in “A Kind of Silence”:

I shall speak Swahili in Italy. I shall speak Thai in Tanzania. I shall speak Italian in Thailand, and in an uninhibited polar region I shall speak the language of the land. (Sarang 1978, p. 15)

Languages, the most potent signifiers of human culture, race, culture and identity are uprooted from their 'original' territories and the persona wants to break away from the despotism of originariness. Breaking away/running away, travelling, migration and exile generate the radical politics of nomadology.

Adil Jussawala, discussing the reasons why Sarang is not a popular writer, has remarked in his "Introduction" to *Fair Tree of the Void* that Dilip Chitre, Arun Kolatkar and Vilas Sarang are "an island to themselves-isolated by other writers, ignored by the mainstream" because their writings "reject certain Indian, more specifically Hindu, values and ideals cherished by the more popular Marathi writers and their readers" (Jussawala 1990, p. 10).

CHAPTER 3

Of existentialism, nihilism and the absurd:

The most notable characteristic of Sarang's writings is their pre-occupation with existentialist themes: alienation, boredom, dread, the absurd, the problem of choice/praxis and the possibility of human freedom.

In order to understand the modes of reception of Sarang and his existentialist writings, an explication of the relationship between Indian Writing in English and the politics of existentialism is imperative. Existentialism, like postmodernism, is difficult to define because, like postmodernism, it is more of an attitude towards life rather than an elaborately charted theoretical stance. Though some major philosophers in twentieth-century Western philosophy are generally believed to be associated with existentialism, it is impossible to outline the basic tenets that would describe every existential writer or philosopher. It is a philosophical attitude that foregrounds the irrationality of human existence in the universe and denies any divine or metaphysical purpose behind it. Existentialism emphasises a human condition that is devoid of any essential meaning and rests all the responsibility of choice on human shoulders. Dreyfus has outlined some basic themes of existentialism because

the term is impossible to define precisely. Certain themes common to virtually all existentialist writers can, however, be identified. The term itself suggests one major theme: the stress on concrete individual existence and, consequently, on subjectivity, individual freedom, and choice. (Dreyfus 1993, Hypertext)

In Western philosophy, some names that are generally associated with existentialism are Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger and Sartre. Existentialism is perhaps the most important modern school of thought in Western philosophy when it comes to the relationship between philosophy and other fields of knowledge, especially literature. Works of Dostoyevsky, Kafka, Sartre, Camus, Beckett, Jean Genet, and Eugene Ionesco are generally described as dealing with existentialist themes. Kafka is one of the most important figures in European literature whose influence on Vilas Sarang is unmistakable and Kafka's writings have epitomised existentialism in literature:

In the 20th century, the novels of the Austrian Jewish writer Franz Kafka, such as *The Trial* (1925; trans. 1937) and *The Castle* (1926; trans. 1930), present isolated men confronting vast, elusive, menacing bureaucracies; Kafka's themes of anxiety, guilt, and solitude reflect the influence of Kierkegaard, Dostoyevsky, and Nietzsche. (Ibid.)

Existential themes are not totally absent in non-Western thought but as a philosophical movement, existentialism clearly arises from a location in Western intellectual tradition. Though Zen Buddhism's emphasis on an irrational, absurd and incomprehensible universe is very close to the existentialist nihilism of Camus and Beckett, Camus and Beckett get more philosophical attention than D.T. Suzuki. The relationship between knowledge systems and philosophies of the East and the West is, however, not transparent or single-faceted. In the cultural interaction between different societies, economic and material realities play a very important role.

Edward Said's classic *Orientalism* is a monumental work that exposes the nature of the West's interaction with the East and how it gives birth to an Orientalist Western subject. In the dialectical relationship between the East and the West, the West has had a dominant position that has been maintained in the transition from imperialism to globalisation. Under economic and military pressures, cultural and linguistic practices have been represented as 'universal' aspects of 'modernity'. This status of the Western as being the universal shows through in all the cultural and historical productions of the West: verbal and social texts, and other historical-material realities. This transformation of Western cultural productions into global/universal cultural productions is a result of a history of colonial plundering of the other societies and the introduction of Western canonical texts in the colonies. Had the wheel of history gone the other way round, today the terms 'centre' and 'periphery' might have totally opposite meanings.

This foregrounding of historical and material reality is important for our discussion of the role of existentialism, nihilism and the absurd. Existentialism, nihilism and the absurd have been represented in India as Western cultural productions. While they certainly have been effects of the encounter between colonial powers and colonised peoples, they are also the product of nations moving from traditional social structures into modern and post-national formations and may be seen as separate from as well as complicit with colonial processes. In any case, existentialism's emphasis on the contingency of value and freedom of choice, and the absurd's overthrow of classical notions of representation and human rationality amount to critiques of western imperialist epistemology

and can be seen as correlatives of decolonising nationalist projects as well as potential agents of antagonism to them.

Sarang's interest in the absurd, existentialism and nihilism can be seen as a subscription to Western philosophies as a result of the colonial history of India. A post-colonial critique might argue that Sarang's parading of the problems of 'the human condition' are in fact the problems of a deracinated neo-colonial class of Indians who write in English under the sign of 'modernity.' But it is important to note that Sarang's vision is 'inflected' with local concerns as a new kind of post-nationalist Indian English writer. In Paranjape's words, it is still possible to find people in India "still swearing by Carlyle and Ruskin, Pater and Arnold, quite untouched by modernism, let alone postmodernism" (1996, p. 40). In this context, Sarang's alignment with Kafka and Camus constitutes a clear definition of his political and philosophical affiliation.

Vilas Sarang, in his essay titled "A Brother to the Stranger," writes about Kafka, Camus, Sartre and Beckett as the writers that "appeal to me most" (1992, p. 52) and Adil Jussawala, in his "Introduction" to *Fair Tree of the Void* tells us that "The presiding deity in Vilas Sarang's room at the University of Bombay, where he is head of the department of English, is Kafka. A photograph of his hangs on a wall behind Sarang's desk" (p. 9).

It is possible to see this interest of Sarang's in Western existentialism as only a result of the West's cultural domination in its interaction with its 'others.' It is true that in the realm of cultural politics, the West has the power to contain, consume, exclude and

appropriate the cultural and intellectual productions of other cultures. Though existentialism, nihilism and the theatre of the absurd have been dominant in Western literature, art and philosophy in the twentieth century with Nobel prizes awarded to Sartre, Beckett and Camus, their relationship with Western thought has been subversive and non-complicit. Sartre's famous line "being precedes essence" rejects the whole notion of any essential meaning of human existence other than the meanings an individual gives to his/her life through his/her choices and actions or praxis. The essence of human existence comes after the raw truth of existence. Though later philosophers, such as Foucault and Deleuze, found problems with the humanism of Sartre, it was Sartre who, in the preface to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* called Western discourses of humanism "chatter, chatter" (p. 22) because of their brutal manifestations in the colonies. In this way, Sartre's existentialist humanism can be seen as being different from post-enlightenment, rationalist and positivist humanism, raising the possibility that Sarang, in being 'complicit' with one form of Western intellectual formation is also being resistant to other aspects of its legacy in India.

In all of Sarang's works — fiction, poetry and criticism — one finds a concern with the existential aspects of human life. The characters in his fiction, who are mostly solitary men, are people who are not afraid of facing their view of reality on their own, as the protagonist of "History is on Our Side" has written a history of the Kurukshetra battle (the quintessential sign of Hindu literary-cultural tradition drawn from the climax of the *Mahabharatha* epic) by mixing the "details of the Arab-Israeli wars, the India-Pakistan wars and the Vietnam war" (Sarang 1990, p. 74). Sarang's characters

endure their view of reality without ever worrying about its lack of conformity with the mainstream vision of reality. They are obsessed with describing their world whether or not it follows the so-called immutable laws of morality or cause and effect. Sarang's characters are essentially free people in the existential sense of the word.

In Sartre's philosophical system, consciousness and freedom are not different from each other; to be conscious is to be free. Each individual comes with a separate consciousness and is free to choose how to describe the things around him/her. He or she may choose to see the world as disgusting, horrible, absurd or attractive (Warnock 1967, p. 29). In his preface to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, Sartre writes: "liberty, equality, fraternity, love, honour, patriotism and what have you. All this did not prevent us from making speeches about dirty niggers, dirty Jews and dirty Arabs" (1963, p. 22). The discourse of the West as a bearer and harbinger of human civilisation which lay behind the brutalities of colonial rule was laid bare by Sartre. Despite its apparently mutually exclusive notions of freedom of choice and Bad Faith, Sartrean existentialism undermines the Western bourgeois discourses of civilisation, personal development, social emancipation and post-enlightenment rationality — the thought that lead to colonialism — by foregrounding the absurdity and vanity of these societal, philosophical and social ideas.

Sarang's affiliation with Sartre is obvious in his reaction to the news of Sartre's death: "It was like hearing of the passing away of a friend with whom one has lost touch over the years" (Sarang, 1988, p. 58). The reason behind his losing touch is that Sartre did not produce

any novel, play or a short story in the last twenty years of his life. Discussing this gap, Sarang reaches the conclusion that, for Sartre, literary creation was no longer powerful enough to change the brutal, real world of suffering and death and political action was more important to Sartre than the creation of literature. Sarang's discussion of this conflict is like the discussion his characters have in their minds, ending up with a stasis. Starting with "Who would maintain that a novel is more important than a dying child?," he goes on to say that "pressures of reality are so insistent that even commitment begins to appear insufficient" and ends with Sartre's "We are not saved by politics any more than by literature" (Ibid., p. 62). This stasis is salvaged by the final remarks of Sarang that display his commitment to literature as a source of emancipation: "although all culture may be unjustifiable, one must do one's job, one must write, for books have a use all the same" (Ibid, p. 63).

It is also important to note that Sarang, while showing his intellectual affiliation with Western theories of existentialism, nihilism and the absurd, does not exclude or repress the indigenous intellectual tradition and reality. Adil Jussawala, realising the potential that Western readers encountering Sarang's work may not go beyond its echoes of Kafka to find the particular vision of Sarang, has remarked that Sarang's vision of human predicament is firmly grounded in India:

I am not over-anxious to emphasise the 'Indianness' of Sarang's stories...but it is hard to find a set of protagonists, both in short fiction and the novel, who so faithfully follow their 'dharma' — that hard-to-define Sanskrit word in which meanings of natural law and performing of individual duty, yours and none others,

intersect. Seen in this light, while the man in 'Flies', [sic.] who spends his time killing or maiming the creatures, or the man who persecutes a spider in the clock in the story with the same name, operate outside the 'normal' moral codes of decency and fair play, they at the same time operate within a larger moral framework, a universe whose dharmic law they accept even if they understand it very partially or not at all (Jussawala 1990, p. 10).

Sarang is conscious of the fact that the West is not the only source of emancipatory thought and inspiration for dissenting views, and he likes to recuperate the traces of the Eastern in the Western as he has pointed out that Camus's and Kafka's nihilism was not absolutely Western in its inspiration and development:

The Trial and *The Stranger* are not representative of the Western spirit. Kafka the Jew had something 'Eastern' in him; the early Camus, close to Algeria and Arab culture, had also something 'Eastern' in him...Camus was familiar with Indian philosophy, and may have been deeply, if unconsciously, influenced by it...Camus himself refers to Vedanta philosophy in *The Myth of Sisyphus*...as 'a book of great importance' (Sarang 1992, pp. 52-53).

The nationalist critic of Indian Writing in English might move from this to a celebration of the 'glories of the East,' positing Vedanta as a prior and countervailing authority to Western tradition. Sarang refuses this option but equally underplays the Western origin of his literary vision in his material insistence on the detail of ordinary Indian and expatriate life. He remains 'at the edge' of his worlds, inhabiting the grey spaces between the binarism of nativism and the West.

The relationship between existential philosophy and the erstwhile colonised people and especially post-colonial writers becomes even more important when one takes into account how Sartre's existentialism foregrounded individual actions and the possibility of giving meaning to one's existence through one's actions rather than accepting the collective and national ideals. Existentialist praxis of non-complicity and responsibility has been a source of emancipatory inspiration before the advent of structuralism and poststructuralism and still many writers in post-colonial societies find it a site for the assertion of their non-complicity with the repressive and marginalising dominant discourses whether they be of Western or indigenous origin: for example, Arun Joshi and Vilas Sarang in India, Russel Soaba in Papua New Guinea and Anis Nagi in Pakistan, to name only a few.

Most of Sarang's work is situated in the thematic territory which will not be considered original because of its close affinity with the absurd and the Kafkaesque. One short story "Anil Rao's Metamorphosis" opens with the sentence "I awoke one morning from strange dreams and found myself transformed in my bed into an erect phallus" (1990, p. 99). The style, the vocabulary and the theme are reminiscent of Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* and one may not be able to find anything original about it, but there is something unsettling about the story. The excess of this mimicry of the Kafkaesque is what makes Sarang's work potentially disruptive of both the Western and the Eastern. The result of the metamorphosis is not an insect, a horizontal body, but an erect phallus, a vertical body, which is invested with a great symbolic value in Western

psychoanalysis as well as Hindu religious belief. The narration is not in the third person but in first person and the reader sees the world through the 'eyes' of a phallus. Sarang mocks at religion, and at the way language gets appropriated by institutionalised religions. The organs of speech are displaced and relocated after the metamorphosis and do not serve the normal prescribed functions:

My lips were not where they used to be. They were now located on the top of my head, and it was through that opening that I must now attempt to utter words. With much difficulty I moved these lips, attempting to say '*Hare Rama, Hare Krishna.*' But the sounds that actually came out were quite inadequate, something like 'Harr...harr...kerrr...' (Sarang 1990, p. 99)

Anil Rao's "Harr...harr...kerrr" stretches Indian religious discourses to their limits where the void begins to mock at religion and the nihilist gaps start fissuring the horizon of metaphysical rationality — the fall of the word and the fall of gods. The lingam of the Hindu god Shiva strains to utter words but ends up straining the language. Strategic absurdism is as emancipatory as strategic essentialism.

Both Gregor Samsa and Anil Rao were employed before the metamorphosis but after the metamorphosis they cannot continue their jobs. The face of a productive human being is erased through the metamorphosis and replaced by an insect or an erect phallus. Jobs and relationships no longer can salvage the metamorphosed body. Anil Rao wonders whether his girlfriend will accept his new avatar and Gregor Samsa's father hits him with an apple that pierces his back. Both writers employ the dominant metaphors of their cultures

to foreground the horror and nihilism of human existence. (The apple is believed to be the fruit of the tree of knowledge and Shiva's phallus is the source of chaos and order in Hindu mythology.) Anil Rao no longer cares about his job because his new existence mocks at the necessities of ordinary existence: "I no longer needed to eat, drink and excrete, and had no need to earn a living" (Ibid., p. 100). And he wonders about the fate of his love for Latika: "They say that true love conquers all, and yet, and yet it was difficult to believe that she would accept me as I now was" (Ibid, p. 102). Anil Rao hops to the dormitory of a college where his beloved lives and she refuses to accept his new form of existence though he is by now able to communicate through audible words. Later, he decides to leave his apartment and city for ever and discover whatever his new existence has in store for him. He becomes, in Deleuzean and Guattarian guise, movement without desire, a nomad without an itinerary and a deterritorialised traveller that hops around without a particular place to reach. He is not afraid of encountering his authentic existence. He has become free from what Sartre termed as Bad Faith:

I was no longer an ordinary human being called Anil Rao. Shedding the skin of that existence, I had now gained a clear, purer state of being. To live as an imitation of Anil Rao, to live the life of a timid creature afraid of the daylight, that was surely not my destiny. (Ibid., pp. 104-105)

Most of the characters in Sarang's short stories describe their ontological condition with an obsession for detail that verges on what rationalist thought might describe as morbid. They describe the atmosphere and circumstances with a detachment that results from their trying to seek a balance by weighing both sides of the argument.

The stasis is achieved but the activity that leads to this stasis is labyrinthine. The protagonist in the story “History is on Our Side” has the habit of examining his stool after relieving himself in the toilet but on the day he is narrating the story, he fails to examine the stool because “the faeces slid down the drain before I thought of peering down. Not that this mattered much. And yet I was somewhat upset” (Ibid., p. 72). The protagonist of this story, along with so many other characters in his stories, does not appear to have any desire to get out of the condition he finds himself in and this absence of desire is what makes Sarang’s characters different from the characters of other existentialist and absurdist writers. Beckett’s characters Vladimir and Estragon while waiting for Godot consider suicide as an option; whereas, Sarang’s characters exist as if their existential condition is the only way of being. Their world is devoid of nostalgia and desire and they relish the now and the present with a passion for detailed description of their surroundings.

The protagonist of “History is on Our Side” (1990) like other characters of Sarang, has not found a harbour in the routine pursuit of achievable ideals. He has not succumbed to what Sartre has termed as Bad Faith. The people who follow their role models in order to avoid the anxiety of conscious and authentic choice do not find any place in Sarang’s fiction. Sarangian characters carefully note each and every aspect of the daily unfolding of their existence and they have an eye for minute details of the things around them. The historian describes how he kills the lizards in his lavatory with great detail:

With a raised broom, I slowly get as close to the lizard as possible. The lizard regards me with beady eyes, ready to streak away instantly. Deftly I give it a lightning blow. It

usually falls to the floor, knocked out momentarily, but not yet dead. Quickly I shove it into the lavatory basin, and immediately pull the chain. (Ibid., p. 77).

It is this celebration of what Western existentialists have described as 'thrownness' of being that redeems the characters in Sarang's fiction. The expression of 'thrownness' of being is not limited to Western philosophy only, Indian concept of 'dharma' and Islamic concept of 'kismet' share the same semantic fields of the word 'thrownness' but somehow in the Western order of things, 'dharma' and 'kismet' are not powerful enough to be in the dominant academic discourse.

If Sarang's writings are viewed from a point of view that is limited to finding the Kafkaesque in any piece of writing, then we must remember that Kafka's writings were not immediately hailed and canonised in Europe as well. Kafka's writings do not come up to the aesthetics of mainstream bourgeois institutionalised literature, he is a Western writer and, therefore, will become the only lens through which Sarang's writing can be perceived. Kafka's writings appeared in the German Democratic Republic when Lessing, Goethe and Schiller were "prioritised in publishing, theatre and education." They were celebrated writers because their works reflected "progressive, bourgeois values" and modernist texts "were reread as reactionary expressions of disabling bourgeois decadence and withdrawn from circulation. The works of Kafka were perhaps the most famous example of this [exclusion]" (Jordan and Weedon, 1995, p. 102). We don't need to use this history, however, we can use this example to see the fate of a writer like Sarang in India.

The withdrawal of Kafka's writings from circulation in the German Democratic Republic after 1945 is a phenomenon that may have nothing to do with the West's relationship with non-Europeans but it points out that existentialism and the absurd were the sources through which the other within Western society tried to find its voice. Nihilism and the absurd have been resisted in the West but when it comes to the relationship of modernism and the non-European world, then modernists, nihilists and the absurdists are all accommodated within the great tradition of Western literature and art. T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, Ezra Pound, Samuel Beckett, Albert Camus and Jean Genet are, of course, deemed greater writers than Rabindranath Tagore, Saadat Hassan Manto, Dilip Chitre, Arun Kolatkar, and Vilas Sarang regardless of the treatment they (Western existentialist writers) received from their respective societies. Jordan and Weedon unmask this cultural politics of West as being the universal in the following words:

Who are the great writers, those most gifted with the pen? Sophocles, Chaucer, Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, Schiller, Cervantes, Milton, Dickens, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Joyce, Yeats, Pushkin, Austen, Eliot, James, Woolf, the Brontës, Beckett, Pinter, Brecht, Grass, Gide, Sartre, Camus, Steinbeck. Lorca, Marquez...It is obvious, isn't it? It is White people—mostly White men—actually who have made the important contributions to civilisation and culture (1995, pp. 10-11).

Sarang's existentialism and nihilism finds its expression in such a way that it seems he is recuperating a foreign but not so foreign tradition of thought to bring the other of both Eastern and Western cultures to the foreground. His characters celebrate their being-in-the-world with an obsessive desire for narration. Their narration is circular

rather than linear and sometimes the barriers between linearity and circularity collapse entirely. But even when it is linear, the events repeat themselves without any causal logic as in “On the Stone Steps” when the protagonist thinks about the money of the beggar which he found on the bridge and gets caught in the hinges of his own thought process:

even if I had returned the money to the beggar, it would not have been a real repetition of the incident from my childhood, for all things change. On the other hand, if I had stubbornly refused to return the coin, that wouldn't have really made the difference either, for nothing ever really changes (1990, p. 49).

His characters, says Adil Jussawala, are all ‘one-room-one-man’ people (1990, p. 11) and their life revolves around tedious and mundane jobs and they are not looking for any meaning of their existence which shows that their existence has no essence outside of itself and they have come to understand the futility of finding the essence of existence in or through other existents. It may appear that their existence is sterile as Adil Jussawala has described it, but they remind us of ruptures in essences and the hollowness of morality and metaphysics.

A crippled beggar in the short story “Musk Deer” drags himself on his back and his face is almost always facing the sky and the protagonist, the Musk Deer, thinks that the crippled beggar must know something about God because his face is always towards the skies. He wants to ask the beggar about God but “the poor creature happens to be dumb...Maybe it was the perpetual sight of God that struck him speechless” (1990, p. 20). The transcendental signified,

whatever its cultural origin, comes under severe attack at the hand of an absurdist writer — Beckett, Camus or Sarang. With Beckett, Godot does not reveal itself and the characters are caught in the labyrinth of boredom and a circular plot; with Sarang, God's absence/presence cannot be verified because the beggar who is always watching the heavens is dumb.

Sarang and other existentialist and absurdist writers do not get as much critical attention as Beckett, Sartre and Camus do because the reception of the latter group's writings is monitored and mediated by their being institutionalised in the Western cultural productions. Writers like Salman Rushdie and Hanif Kureishi who are based in the metropolitan centres have better chances of being received as contemporary writers than the writers who are based in India, Bangladesh and Pakistan and those who write in regional languages and then have to translate their works into English to have their voices heard. The subaltern has to learn the language of the dominant whereas the dominant does not bother to learn the language of the subaltern.

Existentialism can help the subaltern realise the importance of his or her choices and their political implications. Freedom from Bad Faith and essentialism do have emancipatory potential but one has to differentiate between existentialist humanism and essentialist humanism. Sartre's emphasis on the importance of choice is to foreground the contingency that results from not subscribing to the prescriptive morality of the mainstream. Sarang's writings "reject certain Indian, more specifically Hindu, values and ideals cherished by the more popular Marathi writers and their readers" (Jussawala 1990,

p. 10). Yet, Sarang's nihilism is not devoid of human passion and gets its inspiration from stark social realities of his own society. Most of the characters in his stories belong to the dispossessed classes; they do not have material prosperity and nor do they dream about it. We cannot say that they have resigned themselves to the circumstances yet nor do they want to escape their oppressive lot in life. They view the world around them with the eye of a detached observer who is not going to be affected by his/her own death even. They do not complain because to complain means that they have some alternative views to offer as the solution for their circumstances. They do not see that any alternative would make any difference in the thrownness of their existence. Their existence and their consciousness is the source of aporia because the existence of these characters defies and mocks the systems of categorisations. They are extremely conscious of the world around them and their world erases the boundaries between reality and imagination. It is a world where the cataloguing rationality will lose all its tools and insignia. Sarang's fiction creates a fictional labyrinth, not different from the labyrinths of Borges, Kafka and Sisyphean world of Camus, where categories lose their labels, values.

Sarang's fictional world can also be seen as a recuperation of the Vedantic concept of 'maya' or illusion as Sudhir, the protagonist of the story "Return," dreams that he is suffering from insomnia and wakes up feeling tired:

He felt a bit washed out, exactly as if he had in fact spent a sleepless night. That insomnia experienced in a dream should have such palpable effects was fascinating. (1990, p. 131)

An illusion or dream, an immaterial cause for material suffering, infiltrates the boundaries of conscious reality and disrupts the archive. The (ir)rationality of the absurd falls heavy on human follies and unfolding of history, foregrounding the deferral of meanings or absence of a fixed centre. Bajrang's beloved Shalini in the story "An Afternoon Among the Rocks" wonders at the problematics of the colonial history of India when she asks Bajrang, who is a door-to-door salesman, what part of the town he covered before coming to meet her. And when he tells her that he has covered King's Circle, she begins to wonder:

'Which British King do you think it was? There were so many...'

'What does it matter? Who cares about things like that?'

'King's Circle—the circle of the king. Strange, isn't it—the king is gone but the circle remains.' (1990, p. 115)

The circle that remains is a sign of the colonial past of a post-colonial society and countless 'Queen's Roads,' 'King's Circles,' 'Victoria Streets,' and 'Lawrence Gardens' will remain there in different countries of the world and ordinary, dispossessed people will keep asking unsettling questions about the origin of these names of the places and some tired Bajrang, oppressed by indigenous and foreign rulers throughout history, will live his life without any knowledge of the names with the oppressors. The oppressors can have different names, origins, and racial identities. Amnesia is the source of the pure movement — nomads need not remember the names of the people that changed the contours of their landscape to make it look like the contours of the colonial centre. The existentialist, the absurdist and the nomad all displace the oppression of the signifier by their non-

complicity and disruptive ‘irrational’ movements of thought and action.

The protagonist and the narrator of the story “An Excursion” brings a doll home that a child gives to him and places it on the table in his room and lifts her skirt and peers underneath. After some time, he realises that the doll has become the centre of the things in his room and he begins to theorise about the whole situation like a typical character of Sarang:

It is strange how something dead becomes the centre, whereas the living never keep still and therefore can hardly be the centre of anything. (Ibid., p. 42)

This is a disarming statement that problematises the whole concept of a centre and associates a fixed centre with the dead and the rotten. The absence of a centre displaces the tyranny of the classical notions of representation that contain and inscribe all enunciations. Another strategy of Sarang that foregrounds the gap between the signifier and the signified is his practice of translation. Sometimes, Sarang calls his original writings in English as ‘translated from Marathi.’

CHAPTER 4

Translation and (post)coloniality:

We are digging the pit of Babel.

—Franz Kafka, *The Pit of Babel*

The dictionary is based on the hypothesis—obviously an unproven one—that languages are made of equivalent synonyms.

—Jorge Luis Borges, *Translation*

The term ‘translation’, in its etymology, has the idea of crossing a boundary and this boundary may exist between two cultures, two languages, life and death, health and disease, the unknowable and the knowable or two geographic spaces. *The Oxford English Dictionary* (1971) lists the following meanings of the verb ‘translate’: (a) to bear, to convey or remove from one person, place or condition to another; to transfer, transport (b) to remove the dead body or remains of a saint, or, by extension a hero or great man, from one place to another (c) to carry or convey to heaven without death (d) to remove the seat of (a disease) from one person or a part of the body, to another (e) to turn from one language to another (f) to express in other words, to paraphrase. In all of the above meanings the idea of crossing, taking something away or bringing something home is common. Crossing the boundaries of one’s own culture/language and bringing the other home—domesticating the signs and texts of the foreign culture— is one of the many forms in which colonialism manifests itself.

As has been mentioned, Vilas Sarang has translated his own work both ways across English and Marathi, he has also made many translations of Marathi writers especially 'Dalit' writers and has also written a doctoral dissertation at Indiana University about linguistic differences between Marathi and English. Moreover, as a teacher of English writing in Marathi and working in Kuwait, he himself is translated. I propose to examine the politics of translation in a post-colonial context as another way of assessing Sarang's place in Indian English literary scene.

Translation deals with polarities and binarisms and the spaces between them; it is the grey bridge between white and black. In the context of colonialism, translation is the grey bridge between white and brown, yellow and/or black, for it served the purpose of depriving the other of its uncanniness (Bhabha "Of Mimicry and Man," 1994) and inscribing its texts with familiar signs. In a colonial encounter between two different cultures and societies, translation functions in two ways: on one hand, it makes the colonising subject's culture accessible to the colonised subject by expressing it in the terms of the other's experience and, on the other, it appropriates the cultural texts of the colonised subject by assigning them the signs that are familiar to the colonisers. The colonisers' practice of translating the other is ambivalent in the mobility of its desire and objectification by that desire. While trying to fix the signs and the play of the signs of the other, it aims at beginning a new play— the play of the familiar signs and (con)texts. The meaning of the signs that are familiar to the colonising subject is itself displaced, incomplete, always revising and contingent because of the foreignness of the original texts but the paranoia that generates from the uncanny signs of the other is

repressed under familiar signs and also deprives the cultural texts of the other of their alterity. Like any other mode of knowledge production, the practice of translation operates within the power/knowledge framework and the materially dominant culture employs it as a means of mobilising its political ideologies.

Translation served the colonising project of the Western self as a tool for appropriating and homogenising the other (Niranjana 1992). Translation helped open the body of the other for the panoptical gaze of the self and in return helped the self feel secure in the 'dark' continents which could otherwise make it feel threatened, because of its inability to appropriate the other. For the representation of the other, translation meant the difference between the knowable corpus and the unknowable corpus of the other. The European self could not compartmentalise the unknowable and the translatable stood for the knowable — the part of the corpus of the other that could be brought home, that could be carried across, domesticated: "any Englishman will say of himself and his fellow citizens that it is they who rule the East Indies" (Hegel 1975, p. 103).

Translation was the source of the surety that the other can be represented by the self. As Edward Said has pointed out, the Orient was 'revealed to Europe in the materiality of its texts, languages and civilisations' (Said 1995, p. 77). The idea of employing translation to appropriate the other as expressed in the writings of Sir William Jones shows that translation was considered an instrument that can help "domesticate the Orient and thereby turn it into a province of European learning" (Said 1995, p. 78).

This Western desire to assimilate the other into the self is accompanied by a need to first/simultaneously represent the other as fixed in its difference. Hegel, for example, “brings home” a ‘universal’ truth to the West by isolating a homogenised other: “China and India have a settled existence of their own, and they play no active part in historical progress” (Hegel 1975, p. 216), and “It is obvious to anyone with a rudimentary knowledge of the treasures of Indian literature that this country, so rich in spiritual achievements of a truly profound quality, nevertheless has no history (Ibid., p. 136).

The inability of the Western self to have a dynamic relationship with the Orient, without swallowing the Orient, seems to reveal more about the Western self than about the othered Orient. This denial of the self to the Orient suggests the absence of the professed psychological and rational maturity of the Western self that informs Hegelian justification of the colonising project.

The self-conscious anxiety-ridden self desires to fix, arrest, fossilise, the play of difference and ‘meaning’ to the other and, thus, assign it the status of a knowable and known corpus which does not have any capacity to change because its body is already known, mapped and fully explored— ravished and unthreatening.

The muted vegetative other cannot communicate to the self unless the self translates and appropriates the signs of the other. The only way for the other to have a self is to have a ‘mirror self’ — a self which is not threatening and uncanny because it reflects, doubles and extends the spatial boundaries of the ‘real self’— and be an extension of the self. If it is not a ‘mirror self’, it is an object, debased and

outside the history of the self. The only signs of the other are the signs that can be translated —brought home, Euro-morphised.

Colonisation is not limited to inscription of the geographical and cultural bodies of the other. The lexical and syntactical corpus of the language of an-other culture is domesticated and normalised in translation. The panoptical gaze transforms the lingual materiality of the other into familiar signs; the signs that are already tools of the colonial reason become more mobile, more encompassing, subjugating more lingual and cultural foreign spaces. The translatability of the signs of the other validates the colonial desire to translate, to bring home, the other as well as signifies the desire of the other to be translated, understood. The muted other cannot progress without being understood. If the body of the other shows any signs of contestation, dynamism, of moving away, or splintering, it can be also be normalised through translation as the other that asks for civilisation.

The only representation of the other can be by the self. To acknowledge, or to assign, the other's ability to speak for itself is to acknowledge the presence of a self of the other. If the other can speak for itself, the boundaries between the self and the other will blur, the colonial discourse will turn upon itself and the teleology of colonisation will disperse. The repression of the voice of the other is the site of anxiety and paranoia. Jones's emphasis on translation of Oriental texts by Western scholars because of the unreliability of natives as interpreters (Niranjana 1992, p. 13) shows the anxiety that results from the fear of the possibility of dynamism in the vegetative other. If an Indian translates his/her own cultural texts into English,

there is always a possibility of re-appropriation and infiltration of the language of the coloniser. If the other is dynamic, it cannot be fully known at any given moment and, thus, can subvert the colonising project. Jones' distrust of the native interpreter and demand for Western translators (Ibid., p. 11) betrays the anxiety and paranoia that results from the possibility of the presence of a dynamic self that can negotiate, redefine and represent itself and its relation with another self. Mill's idea that Hindus "need to be understood before they can be properly ruled" (Mill 1972, p. 22) and Jones' statement that Hindus are "incapable of civil liberty" (Jones 1970, p. 712) are informed by the desire to objectify and control the other.

The phallic desire to 'know' and 'explore' the corpus of the other and to create a 'mirror self' through 'spreading the seeds/words' resulted in the translation of the Bible into many regional languages of India. The missionary zeal for translation was informed by the Biblical narrative of the creation of the universe — for "In the beginning was the word" (John 1:1) — and then God, the eternal translator, translated the divine sound of his word into the cosmos and the earth (Barnstone 1993, pp. 130-131). The impact of Bible translations has been so powerful on translation theories that it has made "Bible translation a necessary part of any study on the theory of translation (Gentzler 1993, p. 45). That the missionary zeal and translation studies are difficult to separate in Western thought is visible in the translation theory of Eugene Nida. According to Nida, the most effective translation is that which can establish a link not between the receiver and the message, but between the receiver and God (Nida in Gentzler, p. 53).

According to the Biblical story, as Barnstone remarks, “self-translation is a mark of divine, universal power” (Barnstone 1993, p. 144). In the light of this remark, Jones’ distrust of the native translator can be read as Christian/colonialist arrogation of authority and creative agency over creative passivity of the pagan/colonised.

Translation theories of this kind get their mobilisation from the logocentric assumption that the message/meaning exists prior to language and therefore can be translated into any language. The belief that meaning is an ahistorical timeless (and universal) given rather than a contingent construct validated translations of certain kinds of texts (law and religion) over others. Thus, the Eurologocentrism of Western thought encouraged the practice of translation to ‘civilise’ the other and fostered the colonising projects and resulted in translations of the Bible into the regional languages of India and of the Vedas into European languages. Nationalistic/regionalist cultural/language programs equally rely on essentialist, autonomous, one way conceptions of language and meaning — on the consolidation of the self and the inability of the other to be anything other than totally foreign or a version of the self. Sarang’s position as a ‘real’ translator who can have a dynamic relationship with the other is strategically important because, in this way, he is able to approach the other without depriving it of its foreignness.

Because the colonised subject is considered either only in terms of or outside the master narrative of the history of Western self, he or she is denied the power to represent himself and his/her texts must be translated and interpreted by Europeans. Gayatri Chakravorty

Spivak's point of the exclusion and silencing of the subaltern voice in her article "Can the Subaltern Speak" is based on the same reasoning. Niranjana argues that appropriation and manipulation of native texts through imperial interpreters and translators is paradoxical because the native texts enter the master narrative of Western history through translation. The monolithic structure of the master narrative is fissured because the presence of the appropriated contaminates it (Niranjana 1992).

It is the power to contaminate, fissure and dismantle the hegemonic narrative of the Western self that gives translation its importance in the post-colonial project. Ashcroft et al. in *The Empire Writes Back* discuss and praise the presence of untranslated words (pp. 64-66) in post-colonial texts as a device for "conveying the sense of cultural distinctiveness" but ignore the problematics of translation as a crucial element in such a post-colonial theory by confining their field to variants of English. The "cultural distinctiveness" that is signified by untranslated words is a problematic concept. On the one hand, *The Empire Writes Back* refuses separatist theories of race/culture and essentialist alignments of language and cultural identity. But on the other, a location of distinctive difference in untranslated words suggests a binarised essentialism which, in general locks the centre/periphery struggle into a mutually exclusive 'unspeakable' difference. The desperate attempt to valorise the distinctive identity of a post-colonial text/culture gets its validity by maintaining the binarism between Europe and its others. The insistence for a distinctive national and cultural reality as distinct from the colonising West also arrests the post-colonial project by making it a counter-discourse that continuously places the colonial

discourse at the centre and, therefore, does not let the colonial discourse be replaced by new discourses. The irony of the post-colonial situation lies in its sheer insistence on the colonial; as Paranjape has remarked that “real post-coloniality...may even be defined as that which is not contained in the discourse of post-colonialism (Paranjape 1996, p. 37).

Bilingualism is the most dominant feature of post-colonial writers and their world. This lingual and cultural hybridity can help replace the imperial as well as counter-discourses and, also, demands a non-essentialist position for a post-colonial critique. While translation assimilates the texts of different cultural realities, it can also function as a non-essentialist strategy of resistance, a third space or ‘grey’ area, because of its revisionary potential. Following Homi Bhabha, Niranjana sees the task of the post-colonial translator in the disruptive terms of post-structuralism:

The post-colonial translator must be wary of essentialist anti-colonial narratives; in fact s/he must attempt to deconstruct them, to show their complicity with the master narrative of imperialism (1992, p. 167).

Sarang, as a bilingual writer and translator from an erstwhile colonised society, can be regarded as a person whose work does not place the imperial discourse at the centre by being anti-imperialist and nor does it attempt to construct an idealised, essentialist version of pre-colonial or post-colonial Indian reality. Rather, it is possible to say that his work is characterised by a certain amnesia of imperialism which itself can serve the politics of post-colonialism. Sarang’s work suggests, as Homi Bhabha has also asserted, the possibility of liminality and hybridity through cultural translation:

the sign of translation continually tells, or 'tolls' the different times and spaces between cultural authority and its transformative practices. The 'time' of translation consists in that movement of meaning, the principle and practice of a communication that in the words of de Man 'puts the original in motion to decanonise it, giving it the movement of fragmentation, a fragmentation, a wandering of errance, a kind of permanent exile. (Bhabha 1994, p. 228)

With Sarang, translation from Marathi into English or vice versa does not have the nostalgia for the original and it is characteristically non-essentialist. In the prefatory note to his collection of poems *A Kind of Silence* (1978), he blurs the boundaries of the indigenous and the foreign/colonial languages and essences with following words:

I find it difficult, however, to maintain a distinction between poems written in Marathi and those written in English. For instance, "Cockroaches" was written in Marathi but the lines "cockroaches on the floor of the night, / Struck by the light" originally came to me in English. (Sarang 1978, Prefatory Note)

Sarang's use of English language in his poems is disruptive and is loaded with deconstructive potential because it points at the aporia and the absurdity of essentialist categorisation. With an unsettling and aggressive syntax and focus on decadence of Indian urban spaces, his poems subvert not only classical Western notions of representation, but also the obsession of Indian critics of Indian Literature in English with the question of the choice of English language for conveying Indianness.

Sarang's statement that he has difficulty in maintaining the distinction between his writings in English and Marathi is a sign of what can be called, to use a Deleuzian and Guattarian idea, an 'anti-oedipal' post-colonialism. Deleuze and Guattari's idea of rhizomatic thought envisions a space that is free of the root-trunk-branch or centre-periphery thinking underlying many resistance or post-colonial theories and texts. Such models preserve the centralist power relations that they ideally seek to dismantle:

at some point the post-colonial becomes the uncontrollable Manichean tendency to divide all literature into that produced by the oppressors and that produced by the oppressed (Williams 1989, p.26).

The kind of post-colonial practices described in *The Empire Writes Back* are, in the terms of Deleuze and Guattari, the oedipal structures of "State philosophy" which seek truth and justice. On the other hand, genuinely *post*-colonial writers like Arun Kolatkar, Dilip Chitre and Vilas Sarang create a smooth motile space where nomadic thought gathers speed and does not even need any mobilisation from the origin of colonial centre:

Nomad space is "smooth," or open-ended. One may rise up at any point and move to any other side. Its mode of distribution is the *nomos*: arraying oneself in an open space (hold the street), as opposed to the *logos* of entrenching oneself in a closed space (hold the fort). (Massumi, "Translator's Foreword" to Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p. xiii)

And Deleuze and Guattari remark that

There is always something genealogical about a tree. It is not a method for the people. a method of the rhizome type, on the contrary, can analyze language only by

decentring it onto other dimensions and registers.
(Deleuze and Guattari 1978, p. 8)

A poem by Sarang, in *A Kind of Silence*, titled “Fugitive Poem” expresses the thoughts that are similar to rhizomatic / nomadic thought. The poem does not only present a verbal text but also presents a visual text as the words are arranged on the paper that look like a grenade or a vase and is difficult to reproduce here exactly:

We walk between the end and the beginning.
Steps are uttered word for word, eye for eye. Feet
count their coins and rhymes.
Lepers on both sides, we walk by the upright road.
Then the ways branch out.
We take short cuts, set our hearts upon
dug-up streets, hope to rename bylanes.
(Sarang 1978, p. 30)

As Kafka, a Czech writing in German, and Beckett, an Irishman writing in French and self-translating into English, invented a minor use for the major language (Deleuze 1994, p. 25), Sarang is also inventing a minor use of a major language which also happens to be the lingua franca in his own country and a reminder of the colonial past. Such writers “are big by virtue of minorisation,” Deleuze remarks, because “they cause language to flee, they make it run along a witch’s course, they place it endlessly in a state of disequilibrium” (Ibid., p. 25).

Sarang, writing about his career as a Marathi writer and as a self-translator from Marathi into English, says that he wrote his first short story titled “Flies” in English and then translated it for a Marathi magazine *Abhirruchi* in 1965. The original English story was

published in *The London Magazine* in July 1981. By that time his other stories that were originally written in Marathi had been published in English as translations, therefore, he reveals, he “allowed this story [“Flies”] to appear in *LM* as ‘Translated from the Marathi’” (Sarang 1994a, p. 309). In this way, multiple translation and a mixed publication history disperses the notion of an original text.

This process of Sarang’s creative output operates against the underlying centristic ‘canonising’ principles of literary judgement, whether of the nationalist or ‘writing back’ schools of criticism, and has precluded him from more than a marginal literary acceptance as a ‘minor’ writer. From the perspective of the publishing industry, translation is not an original product and, therefore, has less attraction for the consumer/reader. As Vanderauwera has pointed out, sometimes the fact that the writing is a translated piece of work is not even mentioned because “translations have a potential of not selling well at the target pole” (Vanderauwera 1985, p. 202). Lawrence Venuti is also of the view that translation is an “offence against the prevailing concept of authorship” and authorship is marked by “originality, self-expression in a unique text” (1995, p. 26). André Lefevere sees translation as a sign that opens the way of a literary system to both subversion and transformation. But it seems that Sarang’s is wary of rigid patterns of thought; he wants to foreground the fact that the classical theories of originality and representation are forms of containment and any effort at containment is dismissed by recourse to nihilism and the absurd. His continuous interest in the absurdist schools of thought and existentialist nihilism has definitely helped him in being able to dislodge originary discourses. This transgression of originary notions

of representation by a writer who is not based in the metropolis and who does not write back to the centre seems to have less cultural value than the transgression of the post-colonial writers who are based in the metropolis or those whose writings address the metropolis and employ the same theoretical vocabulary as the dominant Western discourses.

This discussion of Sarang's writings and translation does not refer to the qualities of Sarang's writing because the value assigned to the qualities of a piece of writing is not an ahistorical autotelic entity as Vanderauwera has propounded while discussing the politics of reception of translated literature:

the reception and appreciation of literary works is not primarily a matter of their inherent qualitative inferiority or superiority, but hinges on a series of interrelated factors ranging from poetics to economics, from prestige to profit (1985, p. 209).

Aijaz Ahmad in *In Theory* has also commented upon how the writings of some of the fiction writers of Latin America find their way to India after critical patronage in Western academic journals. Most of these writings are also translations, but these translations are undertaken by professional Western translators who are commissioned by the Western publishing industry. It is not a surprise that the reception of the works of a writer who does not conform to the West's homogenising, exoticising and commodifying view of India does not cause any commotion in the corridors of Western academia. There is hardly any reference to the writings of Vilas Sarang in the Western critical discussion of modernist writing in India. Even when William Walsh gives a long list of the

experimental, modernist and avant-garde poets of India who write in English, there is no mention of Sarang (Walsh 1990).

Adele King begins the review of Sarang's collection of short stories by referring to Dilip Chitre and Arun Kolatkar, two writers who are also from Maharashtra and who also write in an experimental and modernist style. Sarang's work has many stylistic and thematic similarities with the works of Dilip Chitre and Arun Kolatkar but there is a crucial difference in that Sarang foregrounds the fact that his writings are translated from Marathi into English and that this process also occurs with the collaboration of Breon Mitchell. It seems that the capitalistic modes of production exclude what does not subscribe to the values and aesthetics of the dominant majority. In Kostelanetz's words:

in totalitarian societies, a book is censored at the point of production; in literary-industrial societies, censorship occurs at later points along the communication line (1974, p. 196).

This insistence of Sarang on 'foreignising' his writings through foregrounding the fact of translation can also be seen as an example of nomadic thought that deterritorialises itself to move away from rooted/grounded thought. This deterritorialisation of one's writing by emphasising on the dispersed origins can be a very vital radical strategy. Sarang, as a post-colonial nomad, is exploring what Deleuze and Guattari have found as a forceful Kafkaesque strategy of a minor literature: "How to become a nomad and an immigrant and a gypsy in relation to one's own language? Kafka answers: steal the baby from its crib, walk the tightrope" (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, p. 19). Sarang is of that minority of post-colonial writers who do not find

any solace in national, bourgeois, pre-colonial, anti-colonial and oedipal reality; they are not canonised because they do not have any “abstract universal in the form of a single national language, a single ethnic affiliation, a single pre-fabricated cultural identity” (Bensmaïa 1994, p. 215; original emphasis). Sarang not only fissures the monolithic Indian national structures with his own writings, he also translates from Marathi into English, contaminating the lingua franca of India with the untouchables’ thoughts and words, opening the gaps for the subalterns’ screams through his translation.

The subaltern voice, while being appropriated into the terms of a national civility as authorised social protest under the sponsorship of modernised English speaking elite, disrupts the world of the elite readership and textuality. Translation of Dalit literature into the lingua franca of the country, also disrupts fundamentalist vernacular regionalism. Sarang’s translations because of their uncontainability within any marked territory belong to the realm of *nomos* (nomadic) rather than *polis* (State).

Sarang becomes the Indian example of an ideal anti-Oedipus, to use a Deleuzian and Guattarian term, and the colonial hegemony can be seen as the Oedipus complex of Indian Literature in English where most of the critical discourses are concerned with the questions of an essential Indianness and its relationship with English language because he does not attempt to justify his use of English language. His writings overstrain the indigenous Brahminic narratives to the point of breaking. Like Caliban, the only use he finds of coercive structures is that he knows how to abuse them.

Anil Rao in “Anil Rao’s Metamorphosis” turns into a gigantic penis. Anil Rao new form of existence mocks at Shiva’s lingam, the Indian source of the dance of the creation. The bilingual post-colonial nomad cannot be canonised rather, Sarang writes, “it is the unenviable fate of the bilingual writer to be turned away from both houses he considers his own. People everywhere have a very possessive and exclusive attitude to what they consider their language” (1994, p. 310; original emphasis). The fate of a bilingual writer is the fate of a displaced/displacing mode of thought like the fate of Kafka’s character Gregor Samsa — the travelling salesman who turns into an insect, a permanently horizontal body that crawls and creeps. Deterritorialised/deterritorialising thought cannot have a place in the hierarchical/vertical structures of any particular society. It can only point out the obscenity of hierarchies—the naked lie. The fissures caused by rhizomatic thought are the sites of subversion.

To Sarang, nativist discourses are simplistic and parochial because they see the world in a “Indian-versus-Western dichotomy” and leave “no scope for the writer’s individuality and originality” that is transgressive of both Indian and Western reality (Sarang 1994a, p. 311). Sarang’s writings do not write back to the centre from the periphery; they are manifestations of a nomadic thought that travels in a post-colonial labyrinth between the centre and periphery and everywhere: “my geographic journeying—to Bloomington, Indiana, to Basra in Iraq, and now in Kuwait. I stay away... maintaining an ambiguous relationship to home” (Sarang 1994a, p. 311). It is not deterritoriality of the writing body only; it is the deterritoriality of thought that finds expression in this statement. His poem “To A Crossword Fan” is a celebration of the potential of the spaces that are

not marked by the linguistic and cultural signs. The poem warns a crossword puzzle fan about the black squares in a crossword puzzle for they are “numb unfathomable voids / dense with unmeaning / they don’t need you to fill them out” (Sarang 1978, p. 11). The spaces that are not marked by the signs of any language nor do they welcome any inscription are the spaces that fissure the homogenising narratives whether they are of Brahminic origin or Imperial. Later in the poem he says:

don’t mistake this for a game of black and white
 the blacks are not in the game
 they will just watch and wait
 some day
 they will overwhelm you
 will strike you dumb
 on your familiar cross of words.

(Sarang 1978, p. 12)

This “cross of words” is the site for the enunciation of the inbetweenness of the translated / translating subject that is also beyond the binaries and polarities—that can “strike you dumb.” This inbetweenness calls for a revisionary post-colonial criticism. A critical practice that does not place the colonial history at the centre by being “post” and “anti” colonial. Translation, as a metaphor and as a strategic device, can displace the containing discourses by pointing at the absurdity of the classical notions of representation. Translation can be an effective decolonising strategy because of its refusal to refer to the essence of any cultural reality.

In Indian English criticism, translation is not a neatly categorised space. Verbatim translations from regional languages into English are not included in Indian English literature and only

creative translations are considered as qualified for a place in Indian English literature:

Indian English literature may be defined as literature *originally* written in English by authors Indian by birth, ancestry or nationality...translations from the Indian languages into English cannot also form part of Indian English literature, except when they are creative translations by the authors themselves. (Naik 1982, p. 2)

By the above standards, Sarang's creative translations from Marathi into English may not be completely acceptable as forming a part of Indian English literature because he does not translate them alone and his co-translator is not an Indian by birth, ancestry or nationality.

CONCLUSION:

I have used the works of Sarang to point out that discursive formations of a field of study, whether colonial or post-colonial in its origins, operate on the similar power/knowledge process and produce their repressions and exclusions in their very mobilisation. Throughout the dissertation, I have employed the Deleuze and Guattari's radical notion of the difference between nomadic thought and rooted thought because their theories describe Sarang's life, oeuvre and positionality in Indian English literature eloquently, despite the fact that their ideas have not been applied to analyse Indian English literature very much. I have found Deleuze and Guattari's ideas quite useful for dealing with the newnesses that Sarang's work generates though their very radical ideas seem to have

been assimilated in neo-colonial discourses of an endless postmodern deferral.

The work of Vilas Sarang foregrounds what Olijnyk Arthur has called “the problematics of inbetweenness” (1989, p. 32). Traditional post-colonial theory, despite its radicality, remains limited to the spatial and temporal logic of sedentary thought, a space where the memories of oppression and the desires for revision remain mortgaged to linear thought structures.

This study, to the best of my knowledge, is the first dissertation on Vilas Sarang’s work from a post-colonial perspective and, therefore, suffers from a lack of critical material to support certain assumptions and statements made above. Except one or two reviews of his works, there are no critical studies available on his work and this fact also supports the statement that his is a marginal position in the canon of Indian English literature. This lack of critical response can be explained if we see the limitations of both nationalist and ‘writing back’ critical models. Post-colonial theory as applied to the modern Indian situation, even within the relatively narrow frame of writing in English, clearly needs a different apparatus to produce an adequate understanding of the complex variety of textual and cultural practices operating under the sign of ‘Indian’. In Sarang’s case attention to globalisation and diasporic formations such as enunciated in different contexts by Paul Gilroy and Ian Chambers (Chambers and Curti 1996) may prove to be productive. Another provisional heuristic which for the moment takes us beyond understandings possible in much criticism of Indian writing in

English, or even, perhaps, of the focus on diasporic identity is the nomadology/rhizome/machine model of Deleuze and Guattari.

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